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Feeling Absence:
Horror in Cinema from Post War to Post-Wall

by

Kevin Anthony Wynter

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of
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in
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University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Linda Williams, Chair

Professor Jeffrey Skoller

Professor Abigail De Kosnik

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Kevin Anthony Wynter

Abstract

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Since the early 1990s the twin leitmotifs of the European art house, and French cinema in particular, have been images of intense graphic violence and explicit sexuality. Scholars and critics generally refer to this phenomenon as a tendency toward “New Extremism” in cinema. In this dissertation, I demonstrate that the violence and sexuality in these films is neither “new” nor “extreme,” but extends and expands upon the themes and elements of the modern American horror film. Historical context is largely missing from existing scholarship on these films and their representations of violence, and this project addresses this gap by drawing the violence characterizing post-Wall European art cinema and the violence of the modern American horror film into taut relation.

The definitions of horror have been confused with definitions of related negative affects and emotions, particularly terror. Making a distinction between horror and terror best illustrates these differences by aligning the formal devices and narrative strategies of the American horror film with terror, and representations of violence in post-Wall European art cinema with horror. The point of this distinction is that horror in the popular imagination does not align with the concept and feeling of horror *proper* as it has been written about and understood in continental philosophy and critical theory (where horror is a foundational concept). I show how terror is an external phenomenon bound up with space, spectacle, and the proximity of a threat, while on the other hand, horror is an internal, metaphysical phenomenon linked to time, absence, and memory. Arguing for these distinctions between horror and terror in cinema also has significant ramifications for the history of the horror genre and how it has been received as both a critical object and as a popular text, for not only are we compelled to reevaluate what we mean when we say we are watching horror, but the feelings these works inspire in audiences and the critical frameworks that are relied upon to conceptualize such feelings must also be reconsidered. In this dissertation, I argue that continental philosophy informs a new approach to the violence in post-Wall European art cinema and our general understanding of horror while further clarifying on what grounds horror and terror are separable in cinema.

To Vicki, Peter, Roderick, and Ari

**Feeling Absence:
Horror in Cinema from Post War to Post-Wall**

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Introduction

This dissertation argues that the violence of the modern period of the American horror film (1960 – 1986) and the violence in post-Wall European art cinema from filmmakers like Michael Haneke and Bruno Dumont are thematically similar to such a degree they share a single genealogy. In both cases, violence takes place within domestic spaces, repression within the family unit becomes a wellspring of aggression, and political and economic uncertainty trigger violent acts. On the other hand, both of these cinematic modes differ in ways that radically alter how we perceive and experience cinematic violence. American horror films revel in their violence by coding it as pleasurable spectacle, while the violence in recent European art cinema quite literally challenges such pleasures by weaponizing genre codes against the spectacle or stripping away the codes altogether.

By working out the points of contact and departure between the violence of the modern horror film and the violence in post-Wall European cinema, I argue that the definition of horror has been confused with the definitions of related negative affects and emotions, particularly terror. This project proposes that horror and terror designate different spheres of cinematic experience and challenges the horror genre's uncontested status as an aesthetic gateway to experiences of its titular effect. A sharp semantic separation between horror and terror offers three critically productive results for studies of the horror film:

1) We can engage with the horror genre and its numerous iterations anew and speak more specifically about the feelings that these films seek to inspire. An emphasis on the difference between horror and terror precipitates a radical shift in how we understand the social and ideological content of horror films as representations of collective cultural anxieties.

2) Arguing for the distinctions between horror and terror in cinema challenges the popular understanding of these terms. Thus, the criteria for inclusion and exclusion of films from these feeling states is recalibrated and sharpened.

3) Recognizing the differences between horror and terror helps to resolve some of the debates around the "paradoxes" of scary entertainment; specifically, what compels audiences to seek out feelings of fear at the movies or negative aesthetic experiences in general. In making this distinction I argue that feelings of pleasure when screening horror movies may be tied to experiences of terror, while on the other hand, movies inspiring feelings of horror may not, nor have any interest in, conjuring pleasures of any kind.

The argument that horror and terror mark separate and distinct spheres of experience is indebted to the Gothic novel and the horror/terror debate that began, roughly, in the mid-nineteenth century. The author Ann Radcliffe, one of the genre's progenitors and a central figure in Gothic literature, regarded the distinction between these terms important enough to openly insist upon their differences. Radcliffe asserts that terror "awakens the faculties" by invigorating the imagination, while horror "freezes, and nearly annihilates them."¹ By the early to mid-twentieth century scholarship on the

Gothic novel continued this debate on the differences between horror and terror. Their outlines and something of the history of this debate is sketched in chapter 3.

Curiously, nowhere in all of the literature on the horror film is there any argument for the distinction between horror and terror, as both terms have been generally misconstrued as synonyms in both the popular imagination and at every level of reception.² What makes the omission of this distinction so striking is that for criticism and scholarship attending to the Gothic novel – the predecessor to the horror film – the distinction between horror and terror was central to both its production and critical reception.³ But this distinction vanished in the transition from page to screen and remains absent from discussions of the horror genre. My aim is to recuperate the spirit of the horror/terror debate found in the scholarship on the Gothic novel and to modify the questions of this debate so that they may be applied to the concerns of cinema. In the coming pages, I will show that the terms “horror” and “terror” designate very different categories of experience, and to confuse them is to foreclose vital areas of discussion on not only the horror genre and the feelings it produces, but on other forms of cinema potentially working within the experiential range of horror.

In his book *Cinema*, Alain Badiou refers to cinema as a philosophical situation. As Badiou describes it, “philosophy is the thinking of ruptures or of relationships that are not relationships.”⁴ For Badiou, the value of philosophy resides in the event of thinking the rupture, which is simultaneously the invention of a new synthesis. The violence that “ruptures” European art cinema after the fall of the Berlin Wall demands that we recognize a relationship between modes of cinema that are generally perceived as a non-relationship (the American horror film and European art cinema). The idea of a third phase of the horror film is, in effect, a rupture. By linking the violence of post-Wall European art cinema to the genealogy of the American horror film, I am arguing for a new synthesis between previously non-relational categories. This is not only cinema as a philosophical situation in Badiou’s sense, it is the need for philosophy – continental philosophy in particular – to lend insight to a profound cinematic shift that occurs in Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall. I will explore the differences between horror and terror in the context of contemporary real-world violence and the kinds of cinematic violence to which it runs parallel.

Feeling Absence draws upon the work of key figures in continental thought to make the claim that the horror genre organizes films that are neither structured nor intended to inspire horror in its ontological sense (what I will henceforward refer to as horror *proper*). It is striking that a number of key thinkers and texts in the continental tradition link the feeling of absence to horror: Sartre’s magnum opus *Being and Nothingness* and his seminal novel *Nausea*; Camus’ novels *The Stranger* and *The Plague*; Levinas’ concept of the “Il y a” and *insomina*, to name only a few. What each of these writers uniquely uncovers in his work is that issues of (inter)subjectivity and relationality have at their nucleus the experience of *horror as absence*; an experience that is ontologically enmeshed in the subject’s encounter with both the self and the other or, more radically, the self as other, and in which the materiality of the world is perceived as dissolving. I argue that horror is a feeling with strong links to various forms of absence (absence of bodies, absence of meaning, absence of morality), and that post-Wall European art cinema makes these forms of absence legible.

Theorizing absence as an ontological dimension of horror provides a framework for making a distinction between horror and terror, and positions us critically to capitalize on the many monumental works in continental philosophy, literature and poetry that have sought to express the phenomenology of horror. It is this sense of horror that I will call upon to adjudicate the validity of the horror genre's claim upon its titular effect. Against the background of some of the foundational writings on horror, rooted in continental philosophy's chronicle of the intersubjective encounter, we can begin to account for the semiotic bleed of "horror" into the sphere of literature and later cinema where the word is increasingly stripped of the realities to which it corresponds.

Horror and 'The New Extremism'

Since the early 1990s the twin leitmotifs of the European art house, and French cinema in particular, have been intense graphic violence and explicit sexuality. Prolonged rapes, gory dismemberments, sex scenes with visible penetration, and seemingly senseless torture have defined the work of European art cinema's new vanguard: Gaspar Noé, François Ozon, Michael Haneke, Bruno Dumont, Catherine Breillat, and Philippe Grandrieux. The notion of "extremity" – that is, too much violence and too much sex – emerged as a critical paradigm after the publication of TIFF Group programmer James Quandt's article, "Flesh and Blood: Sex and Violence in Recent French Cinema."⁵ Quandt described this emergent "extreme" phenomenon in French cinema as "[a] recent tendency to the willfully transgressive... Bava as much as Bataille, *Salò* no less than Sade seem the determinants of a cinema suddenly determined to break every taboo, to wade in rivers of viscera and spumes of sperm, to fill each frame with flesh, nubile or gnarled, and subject it to all manner of penetration, mutilation, and defilement." He pejoratively names this tendency "New French Extremity" and considers whether or not filmmakers like Dumont and Grandrieux are participating in a flowering vogue of 'porn-chic' across the contemporary global art cinema landscape or if this proliferation of violence and explicit sexuality signposts a cultural crisis that has compelled contemporary French cinema's most prominent auteurs to pursue a new kind of cinematic humanism.

After the publication of Quandt's trenchant article the term "new extremism" was widely adopted, but its restrictive "French" context was eschewed in order to widen its categorical perimeter, so that films outside of France with a seemingly similar penchant for visceral images of sex and violence could gain inclusion. As a result, the new extremism has by consensus of its use become the term of choice for critics and scholars of these films. What was meant by Quandt to be a term that makes a negative evaluative judgment has been appropriated and, in many respects, redefined as a term of positivity that raises broader issues in contemporary film studies, some of which include: the ethics of spectatorship, audience reception, posthumanism, and the role of the senses in cinematic perception.

But what, exactly, is 'new' about 'the new extremism'? What is so "extreme" about the violence and sex in these movies that it should be deemed "new" within an aesthetic form whose history is saturated equally by images of the body's arousal and its destruction? European art cinema has long been defined by transgressive representations of the body.⁶ To say that present-day European art cinema is more intense than earlier iterations presumes advancement, but to say that these films are "extreme" entails a rather

different set of assumptions. The use of the word “extreme” to explain the visceral intensities of these films enjoins us to ask how and in what ways are these films extreme and what, exactly, are the criteria used to determine this “extremity?” Rather than exploring what makes the violence and sex in a film extreme in one instance and not extreme in another instance, the critical impulse around this question has until now essentially presumed that we should simply know “extremity” when we see it. But if we instead situate these films and their representations of sex and violence within preexisting cinematic contexts, not only does the production of an entirely new category seem unnecessary, we may in turn learn something new about preexisting categories of cinematic representation. For example, if the elements that now characterize this strain of European art cinema (as described by Quandt) sound familiar it is for good reason: these are the same elements that have long defined the horror genre.

The points of contact between the horror genre and the films of the so-called “new extremity” are multiple, though they may not be immediately obvious if one remains constrained by the art film as a conceptual premise. This may be one possible explanation for why there has been such difficulty in speaking about these films until the notion of extremity emerged. Prior to 2004, there were only a handful of published articles that made any attempt at illuminating the possibility of shared themes and iconography between these films. After 2004, the term “new extremity” immediately becomes a categorically expedient means of discussing violence and sex in the European art house: articles on “the new extremity” in European cinema begin appearing more frequently, the term gets its own Wikipedia page, and it also begins to figure prominently in book length studies on this “tendency,” culminating recently with the publication of the first anthology on the subject.⁷

I argue that we not refer to these films as extreme or continue to refer to these films collectively as “new extremity.” As I will show, the term that best describes the shared feeling that is common among them is *horror*. I do not mean “horror” in its popular conception as a term signifying monsters, juggernaut killers, and the supernatural. I wish to use the term in its lesser-known philosophical sense. Turning to philosophy to define horror yields two productive results: we displace the idea of “extremity” with the richer, historically grounded, and more definitive term: *horror*. Secondly, by evoking horror as a point of reference, the horror genre becomes part of a dialectical inquiry on questions of violence in recent European art cinema. I propose that we can learn something by comparing the modern American horror film with post-Wall European art cinema within the context of continental philosophy’s discussions of horror. Scholars of the “new extremity” only see transgression or sensationalism, whereas I argue that these films have more to offer audiences than merely shocking spectacles or prurient titillation.

Presently, discussions of these films as “new extremity” tend to ignore the historical contexts the horror genre. I see these films not only as a challenge to the existing scholarship on horror films and film experience, but also as a means of working out some of the problems related to core issues in continental philosophy: the cancellation of uniqueness and the status of the body, the other as an ontologically threatening figure, radically contingent violence, the absence of meaning from violent acts, ambiguity and the obscurity of meaning at the level of the text, and, most crucially,

the failure of (and irresolvable desire for) relationality between individuals as a constitutive feature of the human condition.

As the term “horror” is explicitly bound up with these issues, I refer to these films as *continental horror films*. This term has two benefits over “new extremity.” On the one hand, the term *continental horror* contextualizes the violent films in this “tendency” of the post-Wall European art cinema by historicizing it in relation to the modern American horror film. On the other hand the term helps introduce separation among the broad grouping of films under the moniker “new extremism” by addressing violence specifically. Narrowing a critical approach on violence allows for more detailed and rigorous readings of these films.

Negative Aesthetic Experience

Film Studies has not yet provided an account of cinematic experiences of horror in the philosophical understanding of the term.⁸ Literature on the horror film has addressed problems related to gender and identification, correlated monstrosity and death with Western capitalist consumerism, and covered the psychological dimensions of catharsis when screening spectacles of violence.⁹ But arguments that address the qualitative dimensions of the horror film – for example, the types of feelings these films actually inspire – have been comparatively infrequent and less persuasive. As the horror genre scholar Steven Jay Schneider has noted, “When thinking about horror, three questions frequently arise: What is the main effect that horror narratives seek to produce in audiences? Why is it that people are so often frightened by what they claim to know isn’t real? And why do so many of us take pleasure from threatening beings and scenarios that would truly horrify if encountered in real life?”¹⁰

Until now cognitive film theory has had the most to say on these matters, as its proponents have sought to describe the determinants of cinematic emotions in “spectators” through empirical research.¹¹ For example, the philosopher Noel Carroll’s book, *The Philosophy of Horror; or Paradoxes of the Heart*, though published in 1990, remains exemplary of the concerns at the center of cognitive psychology’s empirical approach to film experience. In brief, Carroll’s book asks how and why audiences may be horrified in relation to objects or entities on screen they know are not real. Carroll argues that it is possible for one to be as horrified by the content of thought (imaginary objects and events) as one might be horrified by an actual entity or event. From this premise Carroll forms a conclusion as to why audiences might find these experiences of horror entertaining by naming these experiences “art-horror.” He insists that these experiences are pleasurable because they absorb our intentioned, cognitive interests through impossible threats that transcend everyday, familiar categorical boundaries. In essence, we know that what we are seeing in a horror movie is not actually occurring and so this experience must be articulated as different from actuality.

Carroll’s co-existential argument emphasizes a dual relation between positivity on the side of the “spectator” and negativity on the side of the diegesis, situating the pleasures of horror alongside the spectacle rather than locating pleasure in direct contact with the horror film’s negative emotions. This idea of “art-horror” is important because all of the hypotheses made by Carroll in his philosophy of horror, and the approach of cognitive psychology which has dominated discussions of the subject in general, are

premised on the notion that “art-horror” (or any such similar notion) names an experience that is different from actual, real-world horror. I wish to offer an alternative account of the feelings horror genre films produce by bringing together film horror and continental philosophies that link horror to feelings of absence.

This project is a philosophy of horror in cinema that actually takes philosophies of horror into account by asking: why has the definition of horror been set aside by film critics and scholars, even in light of the very rich and productive work that philosophers, novelists and poets wrote in the shadows of some of the most astonishingly violent examples of human nature in the 20th century? Why did horror persist as a categorical concept for organizing certain types of popular aesthetic texts (books, movies, comics, radio plays) in spite of contravening its philosophical definitions? In other words, how did horror become an aesthetic category that seemingly circumscribes texts that can be seen to oppose the feelings and/or experiences it actually names?

Chapter 1

On Extremism and Excess

I. The New Extremism

The concept of a “new extremism” in cinema has taken on a much broader range of meanings since it was first used to both disparage and loosely organize a certain “tendency” toward explicit sexuality and graphic violence in contemporary French cinema. By 2011 – seven years after the term was first introduced by critic James Quandt in his article “Flesh and Blood: Sex and Violence in Recent French Cinema”¹² – an anthology on the subject was published. Titled *The New Extremism in Cinema: From France to Europe*, it was the first book committed to a deeper critical examination of “extremity” in the work of French directors such as Francois Ozon, Bruno Dumont, Phillipe Grandrieux, Catherine Breillat, and other European filmmakers such as Lars von Trier, Ulrich Seidl, and Michael Haneke.

Editors Tanya Horeck and Tina Kendall open the introduction to their anthology with the question *what is the new extremism?* They explain that a turn to “explicit and graphic physicality” constitutes an important trend in French cinema since the 1990s. Films of the new extremism are characterized visually by explicit and brutal sex, and graphic or sadistic violence, but they are also distinguished from other contemporary iterations of violent and sexually explicit cinema (Asia Extreme and Hollywood torture-porn, among others) in their concerted practice of provocation as a mode of address: “...it is first and foremost the uncompromising and highly self-reflexive appeal to the spectator that marks out the specificity of these films...the films of the new extremism bring the notion of response to the fore, interrogating, challenging, and often destroying the notion of a passive or disinterested spectator.”¹³

The volume’s core themes suggest that these films demand affective and/or ethical responses from participants and that they implicate participants directly in the spectacles of violence (ex. Michael Haneke’s *Funny Games* [1997]), or indirectly by means of interrogating the transmission of violent images through screen media (ex. Haneke’s *Benny’s Video* [1993]), while questioning the aesthetic limits of the watchable and the tolerable (ex. Gaspar Noe’s *Irreversible* [2003]).¹⁴ Contravening Quandt’s original polemic, these scholars do not see the new extremism as simply a cinematic phenomenon orbiting prurient curiosities or a mindless preoccupation with gore and eroticism. Instead, Horeck and Kendall repurpose the term so that it might alternatively be perceived as a mode of cinematic practice that engages directly with the participant, a methodological approach to filmmaking grounded in philosophical purpose and intentionality not easily reduced to a series of effects that amount merely to a rising tide of sex and violence. “While it was Quandt’s notion of a new ‘extremity’ that initiated the debates that were to follow,” they note, “it is the idea of a ‘new extremism’ in contemporary filmmaking that has gained more widespread usage.”¹⁵ Thus, it is the central aim of their collection to open up the concept of a new extremism further by examining how these films employ a “confrontational aesthetic strategy” that helps to

shed light on issues of audience reception, aesthetics, and politics, as well as issues related to film experience in millennial European cinema.

Ironically, in an anthology dedicated to repurposing “the new extremism” into a conceptually positive term, the final word is given to the term’s progenitor. In an afterthought titled, “More Moralism from that ‘Wordy Fuck,’” James Quandt seemingly rejoins the question, “what is the new extremism?” and attempts to anachronize its further consideration by asking instead, “what *was* the new extremism?” He suggests that the “tendency” was maybe only a short-lived resurgence of the violational tradition of French culture, or the willful imposition of thematic pattern on a disparate and disconnected group of films. Whatever the new extremism might have been, as Quandt makes clear, by the end of the first decade of the new millennium the idea is no longer relevant.

Here the contrast between Quandt’s coining of the term “new extremism” as a derogatory moniker for a small, but important range of work from an emerging new vanguard in European art cinema (and his subsequent attempt to distance himself from its continued use) and Horeck’s and Kendall’s adoption of the term, and their championing of its further expansion as a label for various representational and formal characteristics, reveals a conceptually internal contradiction in the idea of a “new extremism.” Rather than attempting to litigate this internal contradiction or to remediate this term, or worse, to burden it further by imputing other meaning it was never meant to accommodate, I propose that the idea of a new extremism be reconsidered within a more nuanced and historically pertinent context. Rather than asking “what *is* the new extremism?” or “what *was* the new extremism,” I ask, *why* the new extremism at all? There are very clear antecedents for the types of violence and sex these films depict, making the need for a new category of “extremism” questionable.

This chapter challenges the notion of a “new extremity” by advancing several disputes against the premises on which it is assumed violence and sexuality in European art cinema – French art cinema in particular – of the 1990s and 2000s is “extreme,” or at one time was believed to be extreme. It will also address the spurious notion that these films are too disconnected and disparate to be considered more than merely a tendency. If we bring together all of the films that exhibit graphic violence or explicit sex in European art cinema over the past two decades, it might certainly appear that these films are disconnected. But it should not be ignored that an attempt to make a wide range of texts cohere on the premise of “extreme” violence and sexuality openly invites the possibility of critical imprecision. One is left with few alternatives aside from relying upon broad notions of transgression and sensationalism to think about the films collectively. But with a keener eye we can see the films themselves ill fit the definition of loosely connected or disparate. What becomes clear upon closer inspection is that the idea of a new extremism itself mandates a sense of disconnectedness by framing these films in terms that discourage a finer grain of analysis (an emphasis on either sex *or* violence). In fact, one might conclude that only the term itself produces the disparateness it argues for. Rather than insisting upon the disparateness of these films or laboring to draw out points of separation and difference, I argue that an understanding of these films is better served by establishing a sense of continuity between them. At present, no effort has yet appeared that contributes to our understanding just what the word “extreme” itself measures in relation to these films, or more importantly, how one might determine the degree in which an aesthetic experience has become “extreme.”

In order to situate the new extremism within the broader context of film studies, some scholars have made recourse to the notion of “excess” in cinema, a term freighted with a range of meanings, most important of which is Linda Williams’ use of the term in her seminal essay, “Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, Excess.” But using the terms “excess” or “extremity” sometimes illuminates as much about the qualities of a film as it does to obscure or neglect other qualities that are equally important. While it is true that many of the films constituting the so-called new extremity remain disconnected and disparate, they fail to do so uniformly. For example, while to argue that Michael Winterbottom’s *9 Songs* (2004) is thematically or stylistically dissimilar to Michael Haneke’s *Funny Games* (1997) is certainly defensible, a more difficult claim to make would be to say *Funny Games* and Gaspar Noe’s *I Stand Alone* (1998) are dissimilar. Likewise, one could suggest that a film like Claire Denis’ *Trouble Everyday* (2001) and Phillippe Grandrieux’s *Sombre* (1998) are divergent – two films that I will show in later chapters that are in fact closely related – in just the same way as Catherine Breillat’s *Romance* (1999) might differ from any of the aforementioned films. For these reasons, supplementing a term intended to polemicize, or attempting to shoehorn ideas into a concept never intended to accommodate expansion or recuperation seems misguided.

The idea of the new extremity necessarily functions as both a descriptor (the violence, the sex, the physicality) and as an evaluative judgment (x has taken such and such too far; y pushes what is tolerable to a perceived limit). In both cases any legitimate discussion of “extremity” needs a comparative framework in order to measure what is “extreme” against what is not extreme. In other words, “extreme” or “excess” are only operable terms of critique if it is clearly determined that x is more or less extreme or excessive than y . Without a comparative framework that takes the relation of x to y into account, any claim of “extremity” or “excess” is untenable. Put another way, arriving at the conclusion that these films are extreme always appears to be short of a deductive step or premise if what is *not* extreme is ignored.

All of this is to say two things: how the terms “extreme” and “excess” are used to describe this period of European art cinema needs to be examined more closely. Secondly, there may be considerable benefits to narrowing the scope of our critical engagement with these films and the variegated traditions they call upon. The following three preliminary criticisms lay out some ideas toward an alternative approach to understanding violence in post-Wall European art cinema grounded in specific cultural and aesthetic contexts.

1. Equalizing Sex and Violence

From the outset the terms of the discussion around a new extremity in cinema have intertwined the aesthetic domains of sex and violence. Quandt makes it clear in the title of his polemic that he believes both sex and violence in recent French cinema have been pushed to the “extreme.” But in making this proclamation, Quandt disprizes the importance of distinguishing representations of sex from representations of violence. The intention behind equalizing sex and violence or effectively leveling their representational effects is to subsume both sex and violence under the categories of the “visceral” or the “body.” Presumably, the strategy behind allowing representations of sex and violence to go undistinguished from one another is to dilate the criteria of inclusion as widely as

possible to make this “extreme” tendency seem more acute. While sexuality and violence intersect regularly throughout the history of cinema each category has its own distinct trajectory at the levels of production, dissemination, and reception that are determined by protean cultural, political and ideological values.

Pooling sex and violence in recent French cinema – and European cinema at large – together into a single phenomenon ignores many important distinctions between these representational categories. As a critical methodology the new extremism essentially reduces an important area of cinematic endeavor to a series of “tendencies,” while mostly neglecting its cultural contexts, or stripping these films of their *a priori* status as living ideological entities. By focusing specifically on the violence in these films, I wager that a more rigorous, incisive, and historically informed approach to the period can be achieved.

2. The “Frenchness” of “Extreme” cinema

The “frenchness” of this move toward extreme images in European art cinema is emphasized by Quandt, as well as Horeck and Kendall. While Quandt locates “extremism” strictly within the borders of France, Horeck and Kendall only slightly amend his position in their subtitle “From France to Europe.” The idea that a turn to extreme images is strictly a French phenomenon is erroneous. There is a very strong argument to be made that the films of Austrian filmmaker Michael Haneke offer the first instance of what is called “extreme cinema” in the post-Wall period.¹⁶ Furthermore, the phrase “from France to Europe” suggests a movement from one space to the other, when they are in reality already physically and ideologically integrated.

In her book *The New European Cinema: Redrawing the Map*, Rosalind Galt observes, “Films made in Europe have frequently been coproduced by two or more countries at least since World War II, and the idea of “pure” national film cultures is a myth.” Accordingly, “French art films are always already European.”¹⁷ By demarcating the growing intensity of violence and sexuality in European cinema to only its French examples, other countries involved in these co-productions go ignored.¹⁸ Also neglected are contemporary filmmakers outside of Europe who are similarly working with violence and/or sexually explicit themes and images such as South Korean filmmaker Kim Ki Duk (*Crocodile* [1996], *Address Unknown* [2001]), Mexican filmmaker Carlos Reygadas (*Battle in Heaven* [2005]), or more recently Hungarian filmmaker Kornel Mundruczo (*Delta* [2008]), or the Chinese auteur Jia Zangke (*A Touch of Sin* [2013]).

3. Historicizing violence in post-Wall European art cinema

In the late 1980s and early 1990s contentious issues arose in Europe, as they had after WWII, concerning geophysical and geopolitical territory. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent unification of Germany alongside a fracturing Soviet Union were crucial examples of the radical upheavals taking place in every aspect of European life. The borders of Europe were becoming increasingly diffuse and difficult to discern as “the idea of Europe as a psychic, cultural, and geopolitical location” was undergoing radical, even traumatic, transformations.¹⁹ As Eric Hobsbawm points out in his book *The Age of Extremes: A Short History of the Twentieth Century*, “We do not know what will come next, and what the third millennium will be like, even though we can be certain that

the Short Twentieth Century will have shaped it. However, there can be no serious doubt that in the late 1980s and early 1990s an era in world history ended and a new one began."²⁰ These and other pertinent historical realities of post-Wall Europe are mostly absent from the literature on the new extremism.

These films have also been portrayed (at best) as poor imitations of the modern European canon, or (at worst) as an ahistorical phenomenon in contemporary European art cinema. In any case, the real world contexts from which these films emerge goes almost entirely ignored as any organic relation to the histories involved in shaping these films is elided. In this sense, when Rosalind Galt stresses the significance of historical context, her points are well taken: "We cannot separate...theoretical discourses on cinematic space and time from the histories and places that have underwritten them; this is no less true for the history of the post-Wall continent than it is for the traumas of mid-century...For in the European cinema of the 1990s, the cinematic image become readable precisely as a troubling of space and time."²¹

In the precariously transitional moment between the 1980s and the 1990s, violence in everyday life increasingly became a reality for Europeans. Hobsbawm tells us, "The last part of the century was a new era of decomposition, uncertainty and crisis – and indeed, for large parts of the world such as Africa, the former USSR and the formerly socialist parts of Europe, of catastrophe. As the 1980s gave way to the 1990s, the mood of those who reflected on the century's past and future was a growing fin-de-siecle gloom."²² The instability and crisis of the period was not simply a mood or feeling. The onset of economic collapse, social disintegration and, above all, ideological uncertainty began manifesting itself in eruptions of violence across the continent. Cultural critics Bruce Lawrence and Aisha Karim reiterate Hobsbam's observation concerning decomposition and crisis in Europe while emphasizing the centrality of violence during this period. In the introduction to their edited volume *On Violence* Lawrence and Karim insist that: "Violence marks the new millennium; it registers as *the* sign of post-Cold War fever. After the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall, both Americans and Europeans thought that a new moment had arrived, that peace seemed within the grasp of wise statesmen. But the Gulf War, the Bosnian War, and the collapse of the Oslo Accords suggested that sustainable peace was still remote, perhaps a mirage."²³

Any serious consideration of post-Wall European art cinema, particularly those films depicting violence, cannot ignore the political and ideological shifts that were occurring as the psychic composition of the continent was changing under duress from social and political upheaval. Galt tells us, "It is clear that as the physical and political territory of Europe altered in the post-Cold War years, so, too, did its cultural imaginary. What is less clear is how we can read these changes cinematically, how European cinema represented revisions of European space narratively, formally, and stylistically, and, indeed, how the terrain of 'European cinema' itself was acted on by the forces that were reshaping the continent."²⁴ I argue that the films of the so-called new extremism, once the notion of extremity is set aside, specifically address these transformations of physical and political territory while making the changes that were occurring in the cultural imaginary of Europe legible.

II. Twentynine Palms and Cinematic Excess

What does it mean to refer to an aesthetic object as “extreme” or “excessive?” Reflexively using the term “extreme” or “excess” to refer to aesthetic works containing large quantities of blood or sustained images of violence can be a very narrow and ultimately misleading process. Alternatively, if the critic interprets the notion of “extremity” in terms of genre formation and audience reception (elements of story, narrative and style), or in terms of a film’s socio-historical conditions and contexts, arriving at the conclusion that a film is extreme or excessive becomes a less elementary procedure.

Consider how determinations of excess or extremity might be made in Bruno Dumont’s *Twentynine Palms* (2003). First, the criteria used to make such determinations would naturally have to take the form of comparisons and if these comparisons were confined to the parameters of a diegetic world – judging a particular moment in a film against any other moment in the same film – the question of extremity would have to answer to the logic of the narrative and the conditions of that particular story world. Consider how violence gradually builds through the sexual relationship of the central characters in Dumont’s film and crescendos in its final scenes.

The first time David and Katia have sex after arriving in Twentynine Palms is a telling indication of the nature of the couple’s physical relationship. They are in a motel pool and Katia stands motionless in the pool’s shallow end with her back to David who is slowly swimming toward her from the deep end of the pool. His approach from behind is framed in a shot-reverse shot formation between his point of view and an over-the-shoulder shot facing Katia. This scene explicitly evokes images from classic predatory films like *Jaws* (1977), *Halloween* (1978), and *Friday the 13th* (1980) where predation is aimed at victims in an eroticized state. David seizes Katia who is clearly stunned by his actions. When Katia realizes what David has approached her for she asks, “You love me?” David responds only by clutching the back of Katia’s head and kissing her aggressively. David then asks a question of his own, “Do you like my penis?” This is not so much a question as it is a statement since David is not actually seeking a response. This rhetorical question is followed by a series of further demands (“Open [your legs]” and “Put it inside.”) as David takes hold of Katia and, in no uncertain terms, fucks her.

Throughout the film, Katia’s sexual activity is coupled with expressions of love and emotions (be they pleasant or volatile). David’s response to Katia saying, “I love you” is showing, “I want you.” This dynamic of saying versus showing is the foundation of David and Katia’s relationship and, crucially, frames masculine desire in the film through the logic of “I want.” Sex between David and Katia is disproportionate in its intentions and pleasures. When David climaxes during their sexual episode in the pool, moments after his aforementioned predatory approach, Katia pushes him away and contorts her body as if she were writhing in pain. David responds by re-entering Katia and fucking her while asking, “Do you feel?” Katia does not respond immediately and David continues to penetrate her until she replies in English, “I feel it” (one of the only times in the film she uses English to communicate as if to make certain David understands that she is indeed feeling “it”). Sexuality, as such, is not about the pleasure shared between partners. It is instead what one person does and what the other has done

to them. This is characteristic of David's desire predicated, as it is, on aggression and the logic of "I want."

When David and Katia have sex for the second time at the motel, shortly after an unsuccessful attempt in the open-air desert where she ends an episode (begun, of course, with David taking her from behind and saying "Open") by stating, "I'm too dry, my love," Dumont recapitulates David's narcissistic desires and his egocentric interests in his own pleasure. The scene begins with David on top of Katia, but immediately shifts to a position where Katia is on top of David. The sex is vigorous and as it draws to a conclusion Katia begins crying out, presumably, in orgasmic ecstasy. As she voices her pleasure David, not acknowledging Katia's cries or even looking at her for that matter, moves into a repetitious expression of, "I'm coming." He repeats this over and over again, ultimately trumping her expressions with an orgasmic shrill bordering on exaggeration. It appears that Katia is in a position of control and is permitted an opportunity to express pleasure, but Katia's pleasure is overpowered by David's expressions.

In their final sex scene, David stands with his back against a wall in their motel room while Katia, on her knees, fellates him. One might usually conceive of fellatio as an act a man has done to him, but as David and Katia's previous sexual episodes evince, the aggression of masculine desire and its expression takes precedent. This sexual episode appears to approach something resembling rape rather than lovemaking. Her head is held on either side by David's hair-filled clenched fists as he vigorously drives his pelvis into her face. Dumont frames David in profile as he lets forth another bellowing orgasmic cry as Katia is left with her face buried in his crotch to bear the brunt of his release. After David is spent, Katia rises to her feet and expresses her love for him yet again. David's response, by way of his primordial yell, has already preempted her expressed feelings with everything he needs to say.

These sexual episodes between David and Katia function as a set-up for the film's conclusion. In the film's penultimate sequence David and Katia are driving through the (seemingly) deserted landscape of Twentynine Palms in David's Hummer when they are violently rammed from behind (foreshadowing events to come) by an enormous pick-up truck, dwarfing the Hummer in size and overpowering it by forcing them into a bush. Three men exit the truck, one carrying a baseball bat, pulling David and Katia from the Hummer. Katia is stripped and held to watch as David is prostrated and beaten with the baseball bat, disrobed from the waist down and raped until semi-conscious. When the rapist reaches climax he, as David did with Katia, lets forth a primal, bestial cry, which turns into a tearful moan as he extracts himself from David. Katia, who has been watching the entire time, becomes hysterical after witnessing the rapist's orgasmic expression. The three men return to their truck and leave as quickly as they appeared.

The scene of David's rape yields a narrative inversion as he is transformed from a figure of dominance and sexual aggression to a victim who has violently become the mirror of his own sexual desires. This last point needs to be emphasized as the universe of Dumont's film, as already noted, is one in which masculine desire is predicated upon the logic of "I want," where expressions of desire come in the form of forceful acts of sexuality and shrills of exaggerated lust. Conceivably, David's rape is merely the next logical step in the escalation of masculine desire expressed in the logic of sexual



Figure 1: David orgasms as Katia fellates him.



Figure 2: David's orgasmic scream overpowers Katia's moans.



Figure 3: David's rapist orgasms.

wantonness. If rape is the ultimate manifestation of sexual aggression and violence in which one individual *wants* another, David's rape is the end of game of such logic.

Dumont emphasizes this point in the scene of David's rape. As he is beaten into submission to the point of near unconsciousness, Katia is held by her hair as her clothes are torn off. Instead of raping her, the attacker forces her to her knees and makes certain that she witnesses David's rape. This is among the more violable moments of the scene of the crime: three male attackers violently assault the couple with the intention of rape, but Katia is never once so much as threatened with rape. The only violence acted upon her is the forceful submission into the position of witness. Yet, it is an even more radical assault upon her, for while she is not raped, being spared the burden of the assault places upon her the burden of a power reversal by being forced into the position of bearing witness to the assault on David (as we, the audience, have witnessed the sexual aggressions against her).

The following morning we find David sitting at the foot of the bed in his hotel room gazing through the window, his face is bruised and grotesquely swollen. It appears Katia is not in the room until the camera cuts to the bathroom where we find her standing naked before a mirror clipping together her bra strap. After dressing, Katia kneels beside David and suggests they contact the police. David refuses. She suggests that he eat something and before leaving tells David, "I love you." David, as expected, does not respond. Katia leaves to get food and returns moments later to find that David has locked himself in the bathroom. She urges him to come out but he does not respond. Katia patiently sits at the foot of the bed until David explodes from

the bathroom with his hair raggedly shaven, brandishing a knife, which he plunges into Katia until she is dead.

The scene is both shocking in its unexpectedness and yet somehow feels completely inevitable. Katia, as she has throughout the film, verbally expresses her love for David who can no longer reciprocate with his acting out desire through sexual aggression or bestial yells of sexual pleasure. Having been emasculated by his rapist, when Katia attempts to touch David he recoils, as physical contact with Katia without the possibility of sexual expression is undesirable to him. His shrill, orgasmic cries would only be a caricatured, hollow echo now. By killing Katia he regains his symbolic mastery as the film's alpha-aggressor and the sexual equivalence (He and Katia both made sexual objects) his rape establishes is diminished; in effect, by killing Katia he shatters the mirror of desire his rape generates. More importantly, David restores the broken link between participant and surrogate by reasserting his position as an active agent in the narrative, though things have now taken on a new and unsettling valence.

Let us consider two ways in which the notion of extremity in *Twentynine Palms* might be established. If the violence at the end of the film is extreme or excessive, then the event of David's rape and the subsequent murder of Katia by David would need to be assessed in relation to other moments of physical aggression throughout the film (an *intra-diegetic* analysis). But the violence at the end of the film arguably carries out and satisfies the logic of aggression and violence characterizing the film as a whole. In fact, not only is the violence at the end of the film *not* extreme or excessive, it is painstakingly symmetrical with the moments of physicality that precede it. The carnal wail of David's rapist is a perfect facsimile of David's orgasmic cries with Katia, and Dumont emphasizes this correlation by utilizing the same framing and shot-scale selection during the rapist's orgasm used during David's orgasms (See Figures 1-3). David being held down and beaten in the face with a bat also mirrors an earlier moment in the film when he chases Katia outside of their motel and holds her down while slapping her in the face repeatedly. If we consider these and other premonitory moments in the film that signal the violence to come at the film's conclusion, it becomes clear that the film's ending operates precisely within the logic of violence the entire narrative is structured upon. To put it succinctly, what we have in *Twentynine Palms* is not extremity, but rather *symmetry*.

An alternative method for establishing extremity in *Twentynine Palms* would be to formulate a comparison not between specific moments within the film, but rather between it and another so-called extreme film or, alternatively, any other film, genre, or mode of cinematic practice (an *inter-diegetic* analysis). An assessment of extremity could then be articulated in statements like: *Twentynine Palms* is extreme in contrast to other contemporary French films such as Jeunet's *Amélie* (2001) or The Dardennes Brothers' *Le Fils* (2002). Or *Twentynine Palms* is extreme in the French tradition of art cinema, or French satire, or French melodrama. But in such cases the question of extremity used in its loosest, most unqualified sense immediately comes up against many possible reversals. For example, are we to measure intensities of violence against intensities of comedy, intensities of laughter against intensities of fear, or intensities of repulsion against intensities of arousal? How, exactly, would one calculate or begin to ascertain extremity in such comparisons? By means of what calculus could such things be determined?

What Dumont's *Twentynine Palms* makes explicit is that the spastic cries of pleasure between David and Katia throughout the film are equivalent to the spastic cries of the rapist; not in excess or more "extreme," but rather precisely symmetrical with them.²⁵ These spastic cries in *Twentynine Palms* should not be perceived as moments of "extremity" or "excess," they are elements used to establish symmetry between the pleasure David takes from Katia and, later, the pleasure the rapist takes from David. One might conclude that theories of excess mistake elements that are integral to the narrative or formal system in question as being extraneous to it. Cinematic excess is then, in all cases, excess by way of addition, as in some situation in which there is seemingly *too much* or something is perceived to have literally gone *too far*. But what if this logic was reversed? If we accept the premise that the excessive element is the element that disrupts or creates imbalance within the equilibrium of a system or order, an element that produces some type of dissymmetry, it is then possible to conceive excess not only in conjunction with the adverb "too" (too much, too far, too late...). Excess, as an imbalance within the equilibrium of a system or order, could also potentially be produced through a missing element or object. This is excess conceived not through means of addition, but by way of subtraction, for what does not contribute to the equilibrium of a system is in turn excessive by way of its *absence*.

The absence of the element or the formal expectation that creates equilibrium within a narrative system or formal order is a means by which cinematic excess may also become legible. If the generic formula has its equilibrium unbalanced by the absence of an *in-proportional* element, it is then the absence of the *in-proportional* element that can be deemed excessive – as that which exceeds the parameters of the system. This move dialectically reconfigures excess not as the mimicry of the ecstatic body bound to the context of a generic structure (which has always-already presumed the occurrence of such effects) or a lack of thoroughgoing motivation in a particular formal or thematic element within a narrative structure, but as the occasion of its absence under conditions when such occurrences are most expected or anticipated. This also allows us to reconceive excess not under the sign of positivity as "too much," but as a seeming paradox of negativity, of not being there – of absence.

Consider how theories of excess in cinema operate within the framework of two critical modalities. In the first mode, the term excess refers to an analysis of form and narrative that emphasizes distinctions between a film's unifying elements and any extraneous elements that serve no necessary function toward advancing the plot or that aid in the formation of the film's structure as a whole. This is *formal excess*. In the second mode, excess is located in the sphere of representation at the site of the objects depicted, which, in cinema, are often times bodies: how we see them, what we see them doing, and how we feel when we watch them. This is *representational excess*. In her article "The Concept of Cinematic Excess," Kristen Thompson addresses the first critical modality by arguing for a theory of excess in cinema based upon "motivation." Thompson tells us, "At that point where motivation fails, excess begins...strong realistic or compositional motivation will tend to make excessive elements less noticeable...but at other times a lack of these kinds of motivations may direct our attention to excess."²⁶ Borrowing the term "homogeneity" from Stephen Heath's discussion of excess,²⁷ Thompson argues that the structure of the classical Hollywood film contains excess by relying on thoroughgoing motivation to homogenize whatever elements might exceed the

film's system. For Thompson, the value of cinematic excess lies in "renewing the perceptual freshness of the work, it suggests a different way of watching and listening to a film. It offers a potential for avoiding the traditional, conventionalized views of what film structure and narrative should be."²⁸

Critical thinking around representational excess is most notably linked to Linda Williams' watershed article "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess."²⁹ Williams expands upon Carol Clover's notion of "body genres" by arguing that alongside the horror film's "gratuitous excesses" we can add the ecstatic weeping found in melodrama and the spastic cries of pleasure found in pornography. As Williams explains, "Visually, each of these ecstatic excesses could be said to share a quality of uncontrollable convulsion or spasm – of the body "beside itself" with sexual pleasure, fear and terror, or overpowering sadness. Aurally, excess is marked by recourse not to the coded articulations of language but to the inarticulate cries of pleasure in porn, screams of fear in horror, or sobs of anguish in melodrama."³⁰

The term "excess" is generally used on the grounds that it is assumed true from the beginning that when we refer either to a moment in the structure of a narrative that calls attention to itself through lack of motivation, or when we experience the body "beside itself" we are in the domain of excess. Yet it remains unclear what, exactly, the parameters are that are being used to establish where the threshold of excess in structure or feeling lies. How might we locate the threshold between what we deem to be normative and what we deem to be excessive? Determining if there is an *intra-diegetic* or *inter-diegetic* excess is to ask if the element or film deemed excessive contributes positively to the governing logic of its respective system. If we are within the parameters of a narrative system and an element of that narrative system that is deemed excessive exhibits positive qualities within its governing logic (the symmetry of violence in *Twentynine Palms*), then it can be said that the action thought to be aberrant actually contributes to the equilibrium of that narrative system. For example, if a (body) genre is a system that establishes conditions and parameters by presuming paradigmatic expectations (the male orgasm in pornography, screams of fear in horror films, anguished sobs in melodrama) when the body sensations on the screen "touch" the bodies in the audience, this should be taken to be an inherent quality of the system, not something that is in excess of it. The theory of excess in body genres identifies excess in moments when violence, emotion, or eroticism, "move" the body of the participant. But if the purpose of the genre is directed toward producing visceral sensations in the first place what, exactly, is being exceeded?

In the next chapter, I propose a consideration of the modern American horror film as an alternative framework for reading cinematic violence in the post-Wall European context. Drawing upon the work of critic Robin Wood and other theorists and historians of the horror genre, I argue that post-Wall European art cinema has produced a radical response to its parallel realities as the American horror film did in response to the political and cultural erosion brought on by the Vietnam War.

Chapter 2

Introduction to the Continental Horror Film

On the one hand, I have never felt great interest in an approach to cinema that was merely sociological, that reduced films to so many examples of this or that tendency; on the other, I have become increasingly aware of the importance of seeing works in the context of their culture, as living ideological entities, rather than as sanctified exhibits floating in the void of an invisible museum.
-Robin Wood

I can't help thinking that this [20th] has been the most violent century in human history.
-William Golding

I. Phases of the Horror Genre

Traumatic ruptures in socio-political life – war, revolution, Genocide – bring about significant shifts in aesthetic production. In his seminal book *Hollywood From Vietnam to Reagan*, Robin Wood argues that horror films are powerful reflections of such traumatic ruptures. The “modern” period of the American horror film, and the formal and thematic shifts that took place in the genre from the 1960s through the 1980s, serve as a barometer of anxiety and social crisis after the Vietnam War. Just as the modern American horror film emerged out this socially/politically/ideologically precarious moment in American history, the fall of the Berlin Wall similarly marks a traumatic rupture in continental Europe and its cinematic imaginary. As noted in chapter one, the post-Wall period in Europe was defined by political uncertainty and social decomposition. These precarious realities quickly bled into the continent’s cultural imaginary and its art cinema. After 1989, European art cinema is marked by a resurgent interest in representations of graphic sex and violence. It is against this background that a genealogical relation between the modern American horror film and post-Wall European art cinema comes into view. I call these films *continental horror films*.

The violence of the modern American horror film and the violence of the continental horror film share a conceptual framework, but it is important that their stark phenomenological contrasts be illuminated. These contrasts will help to illustrate how violence in the continental horror film marks an important transitional moment in our collective understanding of horror as an aesthetic form, feeling, and concept. Critics of the new extremism ignore the critical literature on the American horror film, and I argue that to do so misses some of the essential aesthetic intentions of its filmmakers and the crucial advancements proposed therein for the genealogy of the horror film.

In the following pages I will propose the category of the continental horror film in the context of a careful genre-based and philosophical distinction between horror and terror. I will explore the narrative conditions under which representations of horror and representations of terror are possible and how distinguishing the feeling of horror and the feeling of terror categorically marks a significant moment in the progression of the “horror” film. It also designates the first sustained period in narrative film history in which the experience of horror *proper* is pursued both as on-screen representations and as

an affect inspired in audiences. What the emergence of the continental horror film most urgently demands that we ask is: What is horror? And how is it inspired through cinema?

In order to better understand why the new extremity as an organizing concept is limited and how the horror genre can help to contextualize themes and narrative elements from post-Wall European art cinema, it is important to briefly revisit the history of the American horror film. The most influential and persuasive histories written on the horror genre have been reconstructions that divide the genre's development into two phases. An example of two such accounts can be found in Paul Wells' book *The Horror Genre: From Beelzebub to Blair Witch* (2001) and Andrew Tudor's book *Monsters and Mad Scientists: A Cultural History of the Horror Genre* (1989). As Wells sees it, the first phase of the horror film spans the years from 1919 to 1960 in what he calls the period of "consensus and constraint." The second phase of the horror film Wells calls the period of "chaos and collapse," which spans the years from 1960 to 2000. Similarly, Tudor argues that the first phase of the horror film spans the years 1931 to 1960 in a period he refers to as "Secure Horror," and its second phase spans the years from 1961 to 1984 in a period Tudor refers to as "Paranoid Horror."

In both Tudor's and Wells' historical frameworks the elements that define a particular phase correspond closely with historically specific social and cultural changes. "As the horror genre has developed" Paul Wells writes, "it has inevitably changed, but remains highly correspondent to the social and cultural upheavals to which it runs parallel."³¹ Though these periods are differently named – consensus and constraint vs. Secure Horror/chaos and collapse vs. Paranoid Horror – they describe similar phenomena. What is important to note here is that both Wells and Tudor, as well as nearly every historian of the American horror film, marks the year 1960 as the definitive transitional moment between the first and second phases of the horror genre and the general consensus has been that the modern horror film begins after 1960.

Horror, Brigid Cherry's history of the genre, also divides the "horror" film into two broad phases: "traditional horror" and "contemporary horror." Cherry describes the characteristics of the genre's second phase in much the same way as Wells and Tudor when she writes,

Loss of control has also led to representations of chaos or social breakdown in the contemporary American horror film. Traditional horror presented the problem as an opposition between order and disorder, normality and abnormality, the conscious and the unconscious self. In contemporary horror it has become increasingly difficult to distinguish between these oppositions. As a result narrative closure is much less likely, contemporary horror narratives frequently have open or provisional endings.³²

Filmmakers, critics, and historians of the horror genre commonly share the conviction that Alfred Hitchcock's 1960 *Psycho* marks a turning point in the development of the American horror film, inaugurating its second phase.³³ Wood was the first to point out that, "Since *Psycho*, the Hollywood cinema has implicitly recognized Horror as both American and familial."³⁴ He suggests that *Psycho* begins a critical trend that links monstrosity to the fundamental institutions of American society. This tendency departs from the preoccupation with foreign and outside entities defining the genre's first phase. In horror films prior to 1960, American institutions were seen as the solution to the threat

of the other and *Psycho* is said to invert this situation. As Marc Jancovich points out, “According to Wood, the film identifies the American nuclear family as the source of the threat...*Psycho* is therefore a critique of the institution which he sees as fundamental to American society, the patriarchal family.”³⁵ Following Wood’s lead, Paul Wells has also summarized Hitchcock’s contribution to the horror genre by insisting that *Psycho* first posited the idea of the modern monster as mutable, protean, unspeakable, unknowable, but ironically, and frighteningly, domesticated. “Horror films before *Psycho*,” As Wells explains,

“...whatever their intensity or effect, were essentially narratives that operated within the necessary limits that offered closure and security...*Psycho* sought to challenge this perspective by directly implicating the viewer in an amoral universe grounded in the psychic imperatives of its protagonists...[it] essentially defines the parameters of the text and sub-text of the genre as a whole. It is the moment when the monster, as a metaphor or myth, is conflated with the reality of a modern world in which humankind is increasingly self-conscious and alienated from its pre-determined social structures”³⁶

Certainly Hitchcock did not invent the concept of monstrosity and the everyday converging at a point where they are indistinguishable, nor did he invent the idea of situating these themes cinematically within the domestic coordinates of the American home.³⁷ Six years earlier in 1954, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* had effectively located monstrosity in everyday American life, leaving audiences to collectively cast suspicion upon anyone and everyone as potentially monstrous threats. The film scholar Peter Hutchings has pointed out that Michael Powell’s *Peeping Tom*, about a psychologically unstable recluse who kills prostitutes with a bayonet-styled tripod, is also a key 1960 film that helps to define the new preoccupations of the genre.³⁸ But it was Hitchcock’s *Psycho* that gave the motif of monstrosity within the home an unprecedented status.

While *Psycho* marks a turning point in the development of the horror genre, Jancovich insists that its release cannot fully account for the structural and thematic changes that occur within the genre in the decades that follow. Jancovich insists, “this concern with the family and with the instability of identity...was to become one of the central problems within contemporary horror. It cannot simply be explained as the innovation of *Psycho*, or its director Alfred Hitchcock. It was part of a more general cultural process.”³⁹

Wood insists on repression’s role in capitalist bourgeois society. He contends that horror films from *Psycho* onward reflect the potential for violence in societies becoming increasingly fractured economically, politically, and ideologically. *Psycho* forecasts the themes that will come to dominate the horror films of the 1970s and 1980s. Therefore, I am inclined to agree with Wells when he states, “Arguably, *Psycho* inspires the two dominant paradigms of the horror film in the late twentieth century. Firstly, in identifying, implicitly summing and definitively expressing the core meanings of the horror genre: psycho-sexual and psychosomatic angst, non-socialised violent imperatives, the instability and inappropriate nature of established socio-cultural structures and the oppressive omnipotence of ‘death’, *Psycho* ‘ends’ the horror movie, and ushers in the

postmodern era in the genre....” The second paradigm *Psycho* inspires “may be viewed as *ambivalent realism*, and is predicated on locating horror in a realist context but playing out an essentially amoral agenda or determining a scenario where moral or ethical certainty is unattainable.”⁴⁰

Wood best summarizes this notion of ambivalence in the modern horror film in his description of the 1976 film *The Omen*, in which an American ambassador adopts a boy unbeknownst by all to be the Devil incarnate. As Wood states it, “The Omen would make no sense in a society that was not prepared to enjoy and surreptitiously endorse the working out of its own destruction.” This observation can readily be extended to the whole modern period of the American horror film. In almost all cases and with very few exceptions the American horror films of the 1960s and 1970s are consciously ambivalent about the audience’s relationship to the monster, which is often times a sympathetic character. What is also a source of ambivalence is the idea of monstrosity itself, as the so-called “monster” of the modern period is almost invariably a loved one, a neighbor or a random stranger.

For Wood, the threats of the modern period of the horror film can be summarized through five recurring motifs that have dominated the genre’s second phase since the 1960s:

1. The Monster as human psychotic or schizophrenic
2. The revenge of Nature
3. Satanism, diabolic possession, the Antichrist
4. The Terrible Child
5. Cannibalism

Though there are numerous examples of these motifs in the post-1960s horror film, the most prominent motif has unquestionably been “The Monster as human psychotic or schizophrenic.” It is this chiefly this motif that *Psycho* initiates, and that *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* advances in terms of violence and brutality, and that John Carpenter’s *Halloween* definitively establishes in the seemingly invincible serial killer, Michael Myers. “Indeed, the serial killer,” Wells writes, “has become the staple villain of the post-*Psycho* (1960) horror film, either in the guise of the machete-wielding automaton or the seemingly unmotivated boy-next-door....”⁴¹

The rise of the serial killer as the modern American horror film’s new figuration of monstrosity signals not only an important generic shift in Hollywood cinema, but also some broader cultural and political realignment after the Vietnam War. Returning again to Wells, “In some senses the serial killer, however abstract, gives name and identity to the increasingly incomprehensible violence and brutality diffused through contemporary life.”⁴² The rise of the serial killer serves as the calling card for a new generation of filmmakers as the quintessential expression of fear and anxiety in the 1970s.⁴³ As the serial killer film – also called the “slasher film” – assumes increasing prominence throughout the 1980s with the avenging son Jason Voorhees in the *Friday the 13th* series, and Freddy Kruger in *Nightmare on Elm Street* series, the figure of the juggernaut killer in the horror genre eventually distills the prototype of the serial killer’s psychological profile down to its basic features while profoundly amplifying the serial killer’s violence.

If *Psycho* begins the modern phase of the horror film in 1960 with the schizophrenic serial killer Norman Bates, then John McNaughton’s 1986 film *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* ends the modern phase of the horror genre and marks the

apotheosis of the genre's slasher/serial killer motif in the 1980s. The violence characterizing the modern period of the horror film is not reducible to the figure of the serial killer alone, but it is the dominant motif of the genre and the definitive type of monster of the modern period.

II. Twilight of the Modern Horror Film: The Serial Killer

Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer is a fictional account of the life and crimes of convicted serial killer Henry Lee Lucas. The film is centered upon ex-cons Henry and his roommate Otis who share an apartment in the slums of Chicago until Otis' sister, Becky, comes to stay with them temporarily as she settles into living in the big city. One night Henry and Otis go out for a beer and by the end of the night Henry and Otis are in Henry's car with two prostitutes. Unexpectedly and without provocation Henry strangles one of the women and breaks the neck of the other. Later that night Henry explains to a troubled Otis that there are people in the world who just have it coming to them. Satisfied with Henry's explanation, Otis becomes increasingly comfortable with random acts of violence and murder culminating in a home invasion where he and Henry murder a family while recording it on videotape. Driven to near-frenzy from the pleasures derived from acts of violence, Otis rapes and attempts to kill his sister. When Henry intervenes Otis tries to kill Henry as well, but Becky stabs her brother in the eye with the handle of a comb and Henry follows-up by taking the comb from her and killing Otis with it. Subsequently, Henry dismembers Otis' body in a hotel bathroom. That night, Henry and Becky check into a motel, but the next morning Henry leaves alone and in the film's final shot he leaves a suitcase on the side of a road we can presume contains Becky's body.

At the time of its release, the film was deemed controversial in several ways: the verisimilitude of its aesthetic, its departure from the conventions of traditional horror genre filmmaking, and the MPAA's decision to give the film an "X" rating, making the film virtually impossible to distribute.⁴⁴ In an interview accompanying the re-release of *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*,⁴⁵ the film's director John McNaughton indicates that when he became aware of the story of Henry Lee Lucas it was the first time he had heard the term "serial killer," adding, "This was some sort of new sickness for our time that people just went around randomly picked victims and killed them. It was tremendously creepy and tremendously horrifying." McNaughton's instincts (and financial circumstances) compelled him to take his horror film project in a less normative direction. He notes, "We tried to do something entirely new...when making a horror film they usually involve monsters, but we didn't have the money or inclination to do some sort of outer space movie...indeed this character (Henry Lee Lucas) is a monster, but a human being." This recognition of the monstrosity of the human being – or equating monstrosity with *being* itself – in horror films was not McNaughton's discovery alone, as we have seen the idea that monstrosity is rooted in the human being was a theme the modern horror film began exploring in the 70s, a theme which in fact marks the very modernity of horror film itself. Though films like *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and John Carpenter's *Halloween* are exemplary of this impulse, *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* separated itself by dispensing with a number of the genre's conventions, while emphasizing the act of killing and the very conditions of violence itself.

In his DVD commentary, McNaughton goes on to offer these important remarks about his film: “We also thought that we would redefine the horror genre. Yes, we were trying to make a horror film, but [we thought] we’re going to try to make one unlike any other. And indeed go to the root of the idea. If the horror film’s intent is to horrify, then lets horrify to the best of our abilities, in the extreme.”⁴⁶ This sense of “horrifying in the extreme,” or going to “the root of the idea” and redefining the horror genre through the violence of the serial killer is crucial to the twilight of the genre’s modern period. What *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* accomplishes for the first time in the history of the American horror film is to successfully capture the enigma of the serial killer’s logic and transpose it into the horror genre. By trying to “go to the root of the idea” of horror the film calls attention to the very idea of horror itself and what it means to horrify. What separates a serial killer film like *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* from a serial killer film like *Halloween*, *Friday the 13th*, or any number of slasher film copycats is the banality of Henry’s and Otis’ behavior, and the events surrounding their acts of violence.

What is it about focusing upon the banality of the serial killer’s life and his approach to his crimes that permits conditions of possibility in cinema for “horrifying in the extreme?” Not only does *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* call attention to the enigmatic aura surrounding the violence of real world serial killers, it also calls attention to horror as a category of experience. The idea of “horrifying in the extreme” or going to the “root of the idea” of horror is compelling, because McNaughton does not attempt this



Figure 1: Henry and Otis watch a home movie of themselves killing a random family.

by amplifying the ferocity of the violent fantasies of the unknowable, unstoppable killer that typified the genre throughout the 1970s and early-1980s. Instead, McNaughton surprisingly manufactures a new intensity of “horror” not by *accelerating* the violence, but by *decelerating* the action and exposing audiences to the mundane activities of its killers and the very banality of the serial killer’s approach to his crimes.⁴⁷ This version of the serial killer, and the violence of serial killing, brings into view a significant disjunction between the violence that has typically been named “horror” and the violence of Henry and Otis in McNaughton’s film. This view roots horror in the prosaicness of everyday life as opposed to the adrenalized fantasies of murder and mutilation that had become paradigmatic of the genre at the end of its modern period.

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McNaughton's characterization of serial killer Henry Lee Lucas provides an opportunity for making experiential distinctions in the horror genre that hitherto had not been possible. *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*, as *Psycho* did, marks a moment in the history of the horror film when the nature of the threat and the experience of the killer's violence shift dramatically. It becomes apparent that the experiences killers like Leatherface, Jaws, Michael Myers, Jason Voorhees or Freddy Kruger inspire are quite different from the experiences killers like Henry or Otis inspire. It seems what McNaughton refers to when he states his desire to horrify in the extreme does not extend or expand upon the experiences the modern horror film produces, but rather stands apart from these experiences and attempts to reimagine the feeling of cinematic horror anew. Grasping these differences lies in our understanding of what the experience of horror actually entails.

Critic Kim Newman's remarks on *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* seem to corroborate the observation that the film's feeling of "horror" markedly differs from other horror films of the period. Newman writes, "This narrowing of focus to the unbearable renders the film too disturbing, threatening and emotionally confusing for many. It's conscious incorporation of a viewer's inevitable reaction against what is shown proves a more challenging, uncomfortable and honorable approach to real-life horror than successors' attempts to dress up in the generic guise of thriller or horror movie."

What Newman describes as the emergence of a new kind of serial killer film, one that does the difficult job John Carpenter refers to when he talks about horror films that designate evil as the enemy within (a film that is also exemplary of the ambivalent realism Tudor talks about) are analogous to the elements that are said to constitute the "New Extremism." Yet, no serious effort has been made to establish a connection between the violence of the late modern horror film and the violence of post-Wall art cinema. Where the disconnect between these two cinematic modes may lie, and why they may not immediately seem to be part of the same genealogy, is in the fact that the films of post-Wall Europe, however violent they may be, appear to share no resemblance whatsoever with the form, structure or mood of the horror genre. But this seeming disjunction between the violence in post-Wall European art cinema and the horror genre reveals, I believe, a watershed moment for the horror film.

The violence in *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* introduces several ruptures to the generic paradigm of the horror film, namely, its avoidance of pathologizing the killers through the discourses of psychology or psychiatry. Also, the motives provided by the film for why Henry and Otis go on a killing spree are not explicitly made part of the narrative, they are instead coded within signifiers of class representation (perpetual unemployment, poor grammar, poor living conditions, reference to time spent in prison). In other words, they are merely supplementary to the narrative as opposed to structuring the typical motivations for violence – revenge, madness, return of the repressed – we see in all but a handful of horror films produced during its second phase. This would seem to evince a disconnect between a sense of "real-life horror" and what we implicitly understand to be aesthetic "horror." What can be gleaned here is that the horror genre shows little interest in offering experiences of horror *proper*, and that the waning moments of the modern horror film call attention to this phenomenological paradox.

If the experience horror films provide are not horror, then they are feelings marked by an experience that is often erroneously conflated with horror: *terror*. Making a

distinction between horror and terror would not only radically realign the modern horror film with the feeling *terror*, it would also offer a very clear, relevant and easily applicable framework through which to analyze and interrogate the films of the new extremism. The violence in post-Wall European art cinema referred to as “extremism” moves beyond the feelings of terror found in the American horror film by emphasizing experiences of horror *proper*. It is this profound shift from violence that inspires terror in the American horror film to violence that inspires horror in post-Wall European art cinema that I am arguing constitutes the *third phase* of the horror film – the continental horror film.

The horror genre is reordered by the rise of the serial killer in the mid-1980s just prior to, what I am arguing is, the emergence of the horror film’s third phase. Two years after *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* was produced, another astonishing film about a serial killer and his banal acts of violence was released as a co-production between Netherlands and France: Georges Sluizer’s *Spoorloos* (1988). A close reading of this film offers a refined understanding of the nature of the serial killer’s violence, and introduces a film that anticipates many of the motifs that will come to define the continental horror film.

Nietzsche and Sade Know What You Did Last Summer: Spoorloos

In his essay “A Philosophy of Serial Killing,” David Schmid examines serial killer Ian Brady’s 2001 book *The Gates of Janus: Serial Killing and its Analysis* and Brady’s use of Nietzsche and Sade to help organize his views on living and killing. During Brady’s trial in the UK for the Moors Murders in the 1960s much attention was given to his penchant for the philosophies and writings of Nietzsche and Sade. Schmid notes that, “what disturbed commentators about this apparent relation between text and action in Brady’s murders is that it suggests that Brady had developed philosophical justification for his crimes.”⁴⁸

In the aftermath of Nazi Germany’s collapse and the fall of Hitler, commentators were all too quick to associate Nietzsche’s notion of the *ubermensche* and his ideas behind *will to power* with the objectives of Hitler’s Final Solution. As these commentators saw it, the literature that Brady had used to construct his worldview was based in a humanistic permissiveness that lent itself too easily to the atmosphere of violence that defined the traumatic midpoint of the twentieth century. Schmid draws attention to a crucial detail in the response to Brady’s killings that seemed to reach beyond the crimes as such, locating them instead within a tradition of philosophical reasoning. As Schmid notes, “quite apart from the crimes themselves, it was these justifications – predicated on Brady’s readings of Nietzsche and Sade – that made the case so controversial and so troubling.”⁴⁹ Ultimately, Brady hoped that his actions would be gauged from a philosophical perspective that was weighted toward the types of moral relativism and individuality both Nietzsche and Sade championed.

In his book *Serial Killers: Life and Death in America’s Wound Culture*, Mark Seltzer argues that during the course of the nineteenth century there is a profound shift in the understanding of crime that sees a declining interest in criminal acts and an increasing interest in the criminal actor. As focus shifts away from crimes to criminals, Seltzer believes a type of act (killing) eventually becomes a species of person (a killer). The serial killer emerges at this moment in history.

As Seltzer writes,

By the turn of the century, serial killing has become something to do (a lifestyle, a career, or calling) and the serial killer has become something to be (a species of person). The serial killer becomes a type of person, a body, a case history, a childhood, an alien life form...murder by numbers is the work of the individual who, in the most radical form, experiences identity, his own and others, as a matter of numbers, kinds, types, and as a matter of simulation and likeness (“just like me”).⁵⁰

It is against the background of these ideas related to the serial killer as a type of person and the serial killer’s moral relativisms and self-justifications for violence that I would like to offer a reading of a pivotal scene from George Sluizer’s *Spoorloos* – a film, like *Psycho*, that prefigures some of the dominant motifs surrounding violence in the post-Wall European art film.

At the mid-point of *Spoorloos*, one of the film’s protagonists, Rex, is three years removed from the kidnapping of his girlfriend, Saskia. Over the course of those three years his obsession with discovering the truth of her disappearance has not diminished. During this time, Saskia’s kidnapper, Raymond Lemuer, a science teacher, husband and father of two daughters, has been tracking Rex and his efforts to learn of Saskia’s whereabouts through the media. Emboldened by a television interview in which Rex demands that Saskia’s kidnapper find the courage to contact him and tell him the truth of Saskia’s disappearance, Raymond sends a postcard to Rex and proposes that they meet. Rex’s pursuit of the truth behind Saskia’s disappearance has impressed Raymond so much he is compelled to reveal himself to Rex and to offer him the opportunity to end the speculation over Saskia’s fate. Raymond and Rex finally meet, at which time Raymond offers Rex a simple proposition: if Rex wishes to know what happened to Saskia, then Rex must go through exactly what Saskia went through, after which all will be revealed.

Rex at first refuses the proposition of placing himself at Raymond’s mercy in order to discover the facts of Saskia’s disappearance. Rex begins beating Raymond and threatens to bring him to the authorities, but as Raymond tells Rex: “You can kill me. I acknowledge your right to do so. I’ll take the risk. But you’ll never know what happened to Saskia. I’m banking on your curiosity.” The idea of curiosity is crucial here because Raymond does not take this chance blindly or arbitrarily, it is very much a strategic chance. Raymond is able to bank upon Rex’s curiosity for one very obvious and immediate reason: Raymond knows Rex has been actively pursuing the facts of Saskia’s disappearance for three years. The fact of not knowing what happened to Saskia possesses Rex to the point where he explains to his new girlfriend that after Saskia’s disappearance he gave himself two choices, to believe that Saskia is still alive and to let her live without ever contacting her again, or to let her die and discover what happened to her. This characteristic of Rex’s personality was clear to Raymond, but this alone would not be enough for Raymond to risk the repercussions of discovery and its consequences. Raymond was able to bank on Rex’s curiosity because he too is intimately aware of the power of curiosity.

The two men drive across the French countryside as Rex considers the almost assuredly fatal proposal Raymond has made, and as Rex contemplates the offer,

Raymond tells him the following story: “When I was 16, I discovered something.” Through a flashback we are taken back to Raymond’s childhood where we find young Raymond standing on the ledge of a second floor balcony as he contemplates jumping. “Everyone has those thoughts, but no one ever jumps. I told myself: imagine you’re jumping. Is it predestined that I won’t? So, to go against what is predestined, one must jump. I jumped.” We cut back to the cabin of the car as Raymond tells Rex, “The fall was a holy event. I broke my left arm and lost two fingers. Why did I jump?” As Rex is left to ponder Raymond’s question, Raymond begins recounting another jumping episode that took place 26 years later when he jumped off a bridge into a river to save a little girl struggling to keep her head above water. He explains to Rex that, at that moment, he was considered to be a hero to his daughters, he then adds the following: “But I thought that their admiration wasn’t worth anything unless I could prove myself absolutely incapable of doing anything evil. And as black cannot exist without white, I logically conceived the most horrible deed that I could envision right at that moment. But I want you to know, for me killing is not the worst thing.”

Rex’s “need to know” compels him finally to ingest a sleeping agent prepared by Raymond as a condition of learning the truth of Saskia’s disappearance. In the following scene it is revealed to us what Raymond meant when he told Rex that for him “killing is not the worst thing.” When the sedative wears off, Rex awakens to find that he has been sealed in a wooden coffin and buried alive. Rex begins screaming at the realization of his predicament, then he screams Saskia’s name as it becomes clear to him in both body and knowledge precisely how she met her demise.⁵¹

After a dissolve we find Raymond outside of his country home sitting on a wooden bench several yards from his doorstep reading a book and watching his wife water the garden. Raymond’s children are off in the distance playing and laughing together. The transition from Rex screaming in his final resting place to Raymond enjoying a pleasant afternoon with his family signals that both men are within each other’s proximity; in other words, it is clear that Raymond is sitting on top of the very soil beneath which Rex – and presumably Saskia – are buried.

It is important to note that Raymond does not bury Rex and Saskia in a vacant lot or in some distant woods far from the comings and goings of his everyday life. He instead buries them beneath his vacation home, where he can remain in proximity to the bodies of his victims and the achievement of his crime, which finalizes his mastery over the prohibitory injunction that compelled him to leap from his balcony when he was a boy. Rex and Saskia’s burial beneath the grounds of his summer home memorializes the triumph of his will over a governing ethical code between individuals that demands that we take responsibility for the other. The burial is also the commemoration of a crime through absence, as the murders make absence into a phenomenal substance. In this particular instance the conversion of absence into something substantive relies upon the proximity of the absent objects, the confined corpses of Rex and Saskia. Ultimately, Raymond’s disposal of his victims reveals a mysterious dimension in the commission of horrific acts: Raymond buries Rex and Saskia alive beneath the ground of his summer home so that he can *feel their absence*.

In an observation that accords perfectly with the meeting between Raymond and



Figure 2: Raymond enjoys a pleasant afternoon with his family after burying Rex in his garden.



Figure 3: Raymond looks on blankly as his wife waters their garden.

Rex, Schmid writes, “For, apart from their egoism, the other principle distinguishing characteristic of Sadean heroes is their addiction to self-justification. At the slightest provocation, they will pause in the midst of their debauches and undertake the most exhaustive (and repetitive) explanation of why they are entirely justified in their chosen course of action by speaking of the relativity of moral concepts.”⁵² Raymond tells Rex, “You can kill me, I

acknowledge your right to do so.” This statement from Raymond to Rex works to the benefit of the Sadean hero in a number of ways. In one sense, the phrase makes it known to Rex that death is merely an expected consequence in arranging to meet him. It diminishes the punitive content of death. In another sense, by virtue of Raymond expressing his “acknowledgement” of Rex’s right to kill him, rather than this being a gesture that in fact

acknowledges the potential consequence Raymond must face at the mercy of Rex’s anger, it instead strips Rex of a sense of agency and transforms Rex’s “right to kill him” into part of the logic of Raymond’s coming forward, and the logic of the crime itself. This is how the Sadean hero and the serial killer transform death into a positive phenomenon. As Schmid goes on to write, “The Sadean hero is not exempt from punishment and death, it is true, but he or she is exempt from feeling victimized by that punishment.”⁵³

Seltzer’s description of infamous serial killer H.H.Holmes’ crimes and the conditions of their commission chimes readily with Raymond’s actions. Seltzer’s idea of “addictive bodily violence” is especially intriguing, for it seems possible that the fall Raymond experienced as a child, an event he refers to as “holy,” and the psychological transformation allowing him to overcome a prohibitory injunction that resulted from bodily suffering helps explain why Raymond was able to conceive a scenario in which he had to prove to himself (and only himself, though he frames it in the context of his daughter’s admiration) that his act of heroism in saving a drowning girl is only genuinely

valuable if he proves incapable of an act of pure evil. On the other hand, in an even more unsettling sense, this might not be related to “addictive bodily violence” and might be linked to a more nebulous dimension of the human condition.⁵⁴

Raymond’s obsessive calculation of time and body, the choreography of his movement as he escorts an imaginary victim into his car, the rehearsal of gestures needed to chloroform his imaginary victim (on his daughter after picking her up from school, no less), Raymond chloroforming himself and measuring the time of his unconsciousness, the calculation of travel time and distance from the point he has chosen to apprehend his victims (a truck stop) to his vacation home, the calculation of his heart rate and the successive decrease in its rapidity recorded in a notebook after a series of ‘practice runs’; all of these precursors to a crime, these simulations of the conditions of the transgressive act that remains a mystery to us until the film’s penultimate scene where we find Rex buried in a box are marks of Seltzer’s “statistical person.”

Raymond, the science teacher, is a man who has collapsed the categories of work and leisure, of morality and desire, he is a man of science gone rogue who has transposed the logic of the experiment from the laboratory to the streets of France.⁵⁵ Here the force of Seltzer’s point becomes clear: the phenomenology of serial killing is not felt in the displacement of the self across a field of indeterminate multiplicity, it is instead the concretization of an identity that has reduced the world around him – the whole field of perception, as it were – to a testing ground for the limits of personal desire. To this end, Raymond diminishes the alterity of the other in two ways: 1) outright objectification that divests the other of any identity whatsoever, and 2) the reduction of the other’s identity to the status of an object of curiosity. Put another way, serial killing is the most profound expression of individuality in he who most radically experiences his individuality as totalizing and encompassing of all others.

There are four motifs in *Spoorloos* that are not only crucial to the logic of the film’s portrayal of its serial killer, Raymond, and the methodology of his violence, they also portend the radical shifts to come in the representations of violence in the continental horror film.

Negative Curiosity – When asked to explain the impulse behind his crimes, serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer replied, “I want to see what it looks like inside...I like to see how things work.”⁵⁶ *Spoorloos* is marked by similar forms of negative curiosity in two ways: Raymond’s curiosity around prohibitory injunctions which are universal (predestination and the nature of evil) and Rex’s “need to know” which comes at the expense of everything in his life, and finally, life itself. Negative curiosity renders all moral and ethical considerations secondary, it is a form of curiosity that willingly sacrifices the self to gain a fleeting moment of elusive knowledge. The impulse that led the young Raymond to jump from his balcony and, many years later, Raymond’s plot to kidnap a woman in order to see if he was capable of true evil are both examples of negative curiosity. The power of negative curiosity leads Rex to embrace the symbolic death of Saskia – that is, the notion that Saskia’s disappearance is an assurance of her death – so that he may attend to the pangs of his negative curiosity, and to satiate his desire for knowledge unencumbered by the distractions of her living body. As Rex puts it succinctly to his live-in girlfriend as she is collecting the last of her things from their flat: “I need to know;” a line that echoes on the soundtrack as the image fades to black.

In France the film was released under the title, *L'homme qui voulait savoir* (The Man Who Wanted to Know), but it might have been more appropriate to title the film, *Les hommes qui voulait savoir* (The Men Who Wanted to Know). It is the desire to know for both Raymond and Rex that compels their actions and the film's narrative along with it. In each case the desire for knowledge outstrips all other considerations, particularly consideration for the individuality of the other and the valuation of the other's being. I refer to these films as *negative curiosity* films. *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* is exemplary of this type of film. Another key film of the negative curiosity variety that will be discussed in chapter 3 is Michael Haneke's *Benny's Video* (1991) and Pascal Laugier's *Martyrs* (2008).

The Stranger – A common observation among scholars of the horror genre concerns a newly emerging collective fear in the post-1960s horror film: *our fear of other people*. This anxiety concerning the threatening other in the horror film's second phase is typically a figure whom we come to know through a family member, psychologist, or a law official narrating his/her identity for explanatory purposes. With *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*, Henry and Otis are essentially strangers to their victims and to the audience and there are no explanations given to justify their crimes. *Spoorloos* pushes this logic further in two ways: 1) The film eschews any possibility of economic scapegoatism by identifying the killer as an upper-middle class professional with two children, a wife and two homes. 2) The explanatory process shifts away from the prognoses offered by an "objective," "scientific," perspective, and situates Raymond as (literally) the scientist who explains his crimes.

Critical thinking related to the category of the stranger as a class of person in modern urban society first appears in the work of sociologist Georg Simmel and his essay "The Stranger."⁵⁷ For Simmel, the strangeness of the stranger is not his otherness, but rather his close spatial relations that are also paradoxically marked by remoteness. It is an uncanny spatial relation in which "the feeling of uniqueness vanishes from the relationship" and is integrated as part of an estranging similarity or generalization.⁵⁸ Following Simmel's work, Mark Seltzer points out that, "The stranger, if not quite yet the statistical person, begins to make visible the uncanny stranger-intimacy that defines the serial killer: the 'deliberate stranger' or 'the stranger beside me.'"

Citing a criminological study of serial murder, Seltzer notes, "One of the most brutal facts of serial murder is that it usually involves the killing of one person by another who is a stranger. There need be no motives of hatred, rage, fear, jealousy, or greed at work."⁵⁹ Finally, Seltzer summarizes the notion of stranger-intimacy while making a crucial observation that is relevant to *Spoorloos* and will later be most relevant in the horror film's third phase when he writes, "Stranger-killing depends on an intimacy with others that depends in turn on the proximities of statistical persons in statistical communities."⁶⁰ How a stranger in a statistical community comes into contact with a stranger-killer is another key motif of the horror film's third phase and it is often depicted as being a matter of contingency.

Contingency – In the opening scenes of *Spoorloos* Rex and Saskia are driving along the French countryside. Low on gas, Saskia suggests they stop at an approaching gas station, but Rex elects to keep going and to wait until the next service station. Upon reaching the

next service station, Saskia is kidnapped. The plot point of passing up the first gas station articulates the role contingency plays in the event of Saskia's disappearance. Rex's obsession with learning the truth of Saskia's disappearance and his decision to let Saskia die and learn the truth of her disappearance is an example of Rex's attempt to master the contingencies of a world in which the most heinous acts occur seemingly without reason or purpose. But the violent contingencies of the modern world cannot be mastered nor can the meaning for crimes be acquired in the same way the psychologist in the epilogue of Hitchcock's *Psycho* pathologizes Norman's actions. Now, the attempt to gain meaning for a crime leaves Rex buried alive in a coffin, in the very abyss of the curiosity that once possessed him.

In an interview occasioning the DVD release of Bruno Dumont's *Twenty-nine Palms*, the director also expresses the role contingency plays leading up to the violent conclusion of his film. In response to the question, "Is man good or evil?" Dumont replies: "Man is simply the way he is, it's a question of potential. Education and culture will determine whether he leans one way or the other. I don't believe in the fatality of evil, that's what *Twenty-nine Palms* says as well. There is no reason for the ending of the film, it's purely a question of coincidence, of chance."

The Banality of Evil – This term can be attributed to Hannah Arendt who famously introduced the concept of "the banality of evil" while reporting on the Eichmann trial for *The New Yorker* in the early 1960s. In her observations of Eichmann's deportment during his trial, Arendt insists that the ordinariness of his demeanor offers a very different view of The Final Solution's architects than the psychopathic madmen they were portrayed to be. Arendt's thesis makes the claim that under certain conditions the moral center of an individual's actions can be displaced within hierarchical structures of power. In such cases, the individual is able to rationalize even the most heinous deeds by deferring responsibility for their actions upon the orders of a superior, or diffusing their actions within a societal "mass" of which they are merely one of many. What Arendt calls attention to is the protean nature of "evil;" that "evil" is not only the domain of the sociopath or the psychotic, but, in fact, the greatest atrocities are often committed by "ordinary" people involved in mundane activities

Prior to his apprehension the serial killer Thomas Dillon (also known as The Ohio Killer) sent an anonymous letter to the media stating: "I knew when I left my house that day that someone would die...this compulsion started with just thoughts about murder and progressed from thoughts to action. I've thought about getting professional help but how can I ever approach a mental-health professional? I can't just blurt out in an interview that I've killed people." Reflecting on these remarks, Mark Seltzer incisively identifies one of the deepest facets of the serial killer's personality: "The sheer banality these statements contain is perhaps their point. And this is not merely because, as everyone knows, modern, repetitive, systematic, anonymous, machine-like, psycho-dispassionate evil can scarcely be separated from banality."⁶¹ As Dillon described the attraction of serial killing to a friend, "There is no motive." If the serial killer emerges at the end of the millennium as a type of person, then the banality that characterizes the serial killer's "evil" actions must also be regarded as a quality inherent to the society that has produced him. In many respects, the end of the twentieth century can be characterized as a period defined by the "banality of evil."

In the same year *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* was released, anthropologist Elliott Leyton published a book titled *Compulsive Killers: The Rise of the Modern Multiple Murderer* in which he muses that “after four years of total immersion in the killers’ diaries, confessions, psychiatric interviews, statements to the press, videotapes, and photographs, I see their motives as so obvious and their gratifications as so intense that I can only marvel at how few of them walk the streets of America.”⁶²

What distinguishes *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* from *Spoorloos*? Or, more pointedly, what distinguishes Henry’s violence from Raymond’s violence? They are both films about serial killers and both are exemplary of the negative curiosity film. In the context of the horror film it would also be reasonable to classify Henry and Raymond as monsters. If we consider the fact that all monsters are by definition destructive and that their destructiveness is capable of being variously explained, excused, and justified, then the context in which the violence occurs gives shape to its experience. For example, though an explicit motive is never given for the murderous impulses of Henry aside from his quip to Otis, “some people just have it coming to them,” the film casts the violence of its characters within an Us/Them representational schema. The backdrop of socio-economic depression establishes moral distance between the spectacle of Henry and Otis’ crimes and the privileged position of the audience, emphasizing observation over identification.

On the other hand, Raymond is an upper-middle class professional and parent with enough disposable income to purchase a summer home in the country. His crimes are framed within the context of bourgeois privilege. Inversely, the representational schema here strongly suggests audience recognition and identification over observational distance. Thus, the difference lies in motivation and justification. The context of socio-economic depression and a history of criminal tendencies established early on in the narrative provide motive and justification for their crimes. But there are no such motivations and justifications given for Raymond’s crimes, aside from his own skewed sense of reason, and it is this sense of ambivalence around the crimes and the foreclosure of motivations or justifications that might provide enough distance to move the audience away from an identificatory position into an observational position that gives the violence in *Spoorloos* its unsettling character.

Here we see another key distinguishing feature between *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* and *Spoorloos* as a contrast between the cause/effect/resolution narratives of American cinema and the tendency toward realist aesthetics and open-ended narrative structures of European art cinema. The Hollywood horror film is fundamentally bound to its paradigmatic structure and this is why the modern period of the American horror film runs aground at the moment when the serial killer becomes a new type of movie monster.⁶³ Within the cause/effect/resolution structures that Hollywood narrative cinema is predicated upon, the ambivalence, meaninglessness and banality of the serial killer’s motives cannot be expressed. This is why European art cinema serves as an effective mode for narratively representing the psychic and material conditions of the serial killer and the social conditions which produce him/her.

The predilection toward “realism” in the works of European art house directors allow events within a story world to proceed without causation while avoiding explanation or narrative closure. Just as American cinema produces its most disturbing account of serial killing at the height of a national obsession with serial killers, European art cinema follows-up with a less graphic, though arguably more disturbing account in *Spoorloos*. This contrast is apparent in the remake of *Spoorloos* for American audiences by the same filmmaker (Georges Sluizer) titled *The Vanishing*. Sluizer’s remake distinguishes itself from the original by pathologizing the killer’s violence and enervating the horror of his actions by attributing them to the work of a madman. Thus, how the serial killer’s violence is depicted seems to indicate that there are significant issues also at stake related to how violence is represented in Hollywood cinema versus European Art cinema.

Taken in a different context, when McNaughton declares that his intention with *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* was to “horrify in the extreme” his phrase crystalizes what is at stake in arguing that the idea of a new extremism in European art cinema



Figure 3: After raping a teenaged girl in the woods, the gang from *Last House on the Left* quietly reflect on their actions.



Figure 2: After stabbing one of his victims, Michael Myers takes a moment to stare at the impaled corpse.

ignores having antecedents in the modern American horror film. McNaughton perceives his film to be an extreme example of horror filmmaking when, by all accounts, McNaughton produces a film that in no way resembles a specimen of “extreme” cinema. His achievement is much finer in that McNaughton makes one of the few American narrative films that comes close to touching the nucleus of horror; not “horror” in its schematic sense signifying a range of stylistic motifs, generic elements or narrative codes, or a category broadly organizing films of shared resemblance. McNaughton’s film succeeds by breaking from the schematic architecture of the American “horror” film to strive for the feeling of horror in its ontological sense: horror *proper*.

What this shift in his approach to horror filmmaking reveals is a disjunction between the idea of a schematically structured “horror” film and what the conditions of possibility might be for inspiring horror *proper* through cinema. The misunderstanding lies in conflating the idea of horror with the state of being extreme. It is a tautology to express the idea of “horror in the extreme” because there are no “extreme” examples of horror; horror *is* the extreme. Horror always-already signifies the limits of negative experience similar to what the French existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre once called “nausea” – when the naked reality of things becomes apparent; or what French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan referred to as the “Real” – objects and events beyond the limits of symbolic meaning; or what philosopher Peter McCormick has called a “negative sublime.”

Again, what has been called new extremity is neither new nor extreme, it is instead the logical advancement of the central themes and motifs of the modern American horror film. When asked to describe his intentions in making *Twentynine Palms*, Bruno Dumont has said, “To me, *Twentynine Palms* is an experimental project, an artistic project...I see *Twentynine Palms* as an experiment using as its basic element, the American horror film.”⁶⁴ I wager that Dumont is not the only post-Wall European art filmmaker whose work has been immediately influenced by the American horror film. As we will see in the coming chapters, there are numerous points of contact between the modes and conditions of violence we see in post-Wall European art cinema and the American horror film. But it is important to reiterate the former does not simply extend or expand upon the dominant motifs of the horror film’s second phase. It is equally intriguing and instructive that Dumont describes the American horror film as “a basic element” for *Twentynine Palms*. The question that emerges here is: In what ways does Dumont use themes from the American horror film? What can *Twentynine Palms* tell us about Dumont’s perception of the American horror film? And how does Dumont’s continental pedigree, the art cinema context of his work, and his socio-political moment inform his reshaping of the basic elements of the American horror film?

The continental horror film marks the continuation of the modern horror film’s conceptual concerns, while pushing the spirit of the modern phase to its logical conclusion. I am not suggesting that the continental horror phase is tied to any particular theorist’s formulation of the horror film’s second phase. As noted earlier, in spite of the fact that finer details of these phases are emphasized differently, their fundamental elements are agreed upon. Thus, the continental phase of the horror film does not need any one specific account of the modern period to corroborate either its emergence or the moment of transition from the modern period to the continental period. What primarily

distinguishes the third phase of the horror film from its second phase lies in the distinction between horror and terror.

Chapter 3

Toward an Ontology of Horror: Horror and Terror from the Gothic Novel to the Horror Film

It is, I think, a rather sad reflection on the present state of political science that our terminology does not distinguish among such key words as “power,” “strength,” “force,” “authority,” and, finally, “violence” – all of which refer to distinct, different phenomena and would hardly exist unless they did... To use them as synonyms not only indicates a certain deafness to linguistic meanings, which would be serious enough, but it has also resulted in a kind of blindness to the realities they correspond to.

-Hannah Arendt, *On Violence*

When Athena instigated Perseus to slay the Gorgon Medusa, she warned him never to look in the face itself but only at a mirror reflection in the polished shield she had given him. The moral of the myth is, of course, that we do not, and cannot, see actual horrors because they paralyze us with blinding fear; and that we shall know what they look like only by watching images of them which reproduce their true appearance... the reflection of the happenings which would petrify us were we to encounter them in real life. The film is Athena’s polished shield.

-Seigfried Kracauer, *Theory of the Film*

I. The Horror/Terror Debate in Gothic Literature

The misuse and misapprehension of words in everyday speech is a perpetual and irremediable aspect of language. Etymologies illustrate that over time words undergo all sorts of transformations that pertain to their use and meaning. What results from the misuse of a given word over time is the widening of its meaning-radius. The more a word comes to be misused and the more the perpetuation of that misuse goes unattended, the wider the gulf grows between usage and definition. But there are occasions when the expansion of a word’s meaning-radius begins to strip “keywords” of their linguistic meaning whose gravity we rely upon to help orient us to historical, cultural, and political situations. The natural outcome of this process where misuse and misapprehension expand the meaning-radius of words results in, to a lesser degree, words whose meanings mistakenly come to share associative links to a particular idea, or, in more acute cases, opposing words that erroneously take on the status of synonyms.

In her book *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence*, cultural critic Adriana Cavarero argues that a profound case of misuse and misapprehension in contemporary language has effectively obscured our ability to comprehend the forms of violence that mark the end of the twentieth century. Along with the “keywords” that, for philosopher Hannah Arendt, regrettably go undistinguished in the critical discourse of the mid-twentieth century, Cavarero also insists that the terms “horror” and “terror” at the turn of the millennium need to be ranked among the list of undistinguished keywords so that their precise meanings may be recuperated.

The intensification of violence that has become increasingly prominent in the aftermath of the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001 definitively marks the resurgence of terrorism as the *modus operandi* for radicals waging political and ideological war against the West. As the fall of the Berlin Wall marked the end of the threat of nuclear annihilation that had defined the Cold War for four decades, the destruction of the twin towers in New York similarly marked a watershed moment in the history of human conflict when the collective perception of the world and the possibilities of violence in it were radically reordered. Through detailed descriptions of the violence associated with *terrorism*, Cavarero concludes that the word “terror” does not, and cannot, properly account for the forms of violence used in present day conflicts or for its uniquely destructive character. She insists that these forms of violence, particularly in the obliteration of the body of the ‘suicide bomber’ move beyond what the term “terror” can account for and instead enters the domain of *horror*.⁶⁵ Like Arendt whose thinking was deeply invested in the political and social climate of her time, Cavarero insists that the forms of contemporary violence that have come to define the extreme radical politics at the beginning of the twenty-first century should be referred to as “horrorism.”⁶⁶ This chapter argues that violence in post-Wall art cinema similarly requires that the experiential dimensions of horror and terror be distinguished so that what we refer to generically as the “horror” film and what we call feeling horror *in* or *through* cinema can be demarcated and made clear.

The divisions between horror and terror and the distinct range of feelings each term signifies have not always gone undistinguished. Arguing the distinctions between horror and terror was crucial to the critical reception of Gothic literature dating back to the late-eighteenth century. A review of this critical literature reveals that over the course of the past three centuries the popular understanding of the word “horror” has narrowed considerably. A debate concerning the value of horror and terror developed alongside the increasing popularity of the Gothic genre. By the time the first Gothic adaptations appeared on film the term “horror” had been reduced to a generic trope used to signify a whole sphere of undifferentiated abnormalities and a range of possible encounters with them. As the Gothic tradition began influencing other artistic practices the perversion and misunderstanding of “horror” continued to the point where making a distinction between horror and terror in the popular imagination was utterly lost, a fact that continues to this day. Consequently, in the course of this terminological perversion throughout the twentieth century, warfare and technological sophistication advanced in lockstep. Refined photographic technologies permitted new forms of visibility, allowing the world to collectively stand witness to the implausible butchery and barbarism in a century of nearly endless conflict. So, at precisely the same moment when the word “horror” was most needed, as Cavarero’s work calls attention to, the realm of fiction had begun enervating its naming force.

Making a distinction between horror and terror in cinema not only revives a seminal debate that was central to the considerations of aesthetic value in the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but in the context of the moving image and cinematic fiction, it also initiates a long overdue reconsideration of the horror film by establishing affect and emotion as a primary mode of critique. This distinction has two productive results: by asking the question “what distinguishes horror and terror in cinema?” we can begin thinking more specifically about the industrial considerations involved in

perpetuating certain generic paradigms, narrative themes and visual motifs. Secondly, in establishing the possibility of categorical specificity, we are afforded a comparative model to work from when making claims for films and texts that inspire either terror or horror.

Through the horror/terror debate it becomes apparent that the concept of “horror” has been perceived inversely. In other words, the films that have come to signify the term “horror” are actually responsible for perpetuating the misrepresentation of the word’s meaning in the popular imagination. Throughout the twentieth century associations between horror and popular film stripped “horror” of its metaphysical aspects and reconceived the term as a categorical directive for organizing texts. As a result, the term “horror” came to function as a promissory note – an assurance – to the “spectator” that they will be pleurably shocked or frightened. Establishing the distinction between horror and terror in cinema thus opens up the possibility that the feeling of horror may actually be located elsewhere outside of the “horror” genre.

Revisiting the ideas raised in the horror/terror debate during the Gothic novel’s development allows us to speculate on why making distinctions that were central to this debate became irrelevant at the moment of the horror genre’s emergence in cinema. To understand how the feelings of horror and terror diverge in cinema with the emergence of the continental horror film, it is important that we start from the beginning and carefully consider how this distinction has previously been made.

Anna Laetitia Barbauld, a prominent English poet, critic and essayist of her time, offers one of the first documented attempts at understanding negative aesthetic pleasure. In an essay written in 1773 entitled “On the Pleasure Derived From Objects of Terror,” Barbauld considers “the apparent delight with which we dwell upon objects of pure terror,” a phenomenon Barbauld calls a “paradox of the heart.” Gothic scholar Angela Wright notes that Barbauld was among the first critics to, “embark upon an exploration of the reasons why we endure torture and violence within a narrative, [linking] the pleasure we derive from such tales with the violence inherent in curiosity.”⁶⁷ Barbauld’s essay was inspired by Edmund Burke’s influential treatise published in 1757 entitled *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. Burke was the first to make the connection between terror and the sublime and the impact his insights have had on eighteenth and nineteenth century literature has been considerable. Burke asserts that terror “is the strongest emotion” and that it is elicited through astonishment where “the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that which employs it.”⁶⁸ In Wright’s estimation, “Burke’s *Philosophical Enquiry* is undoubtedly one of the most significant works on aesthetics in the eighteenth century [and] his linkage of terror with obscurity exercised great influence upon Gothic writers.”⁶⁹ In Burke’s thesis, obscurity expands the imaginative faculties and enables us to create darker and more dangerous pictures of situations that lack certainty.

Ann Radcliffe was strongly influenced by Barbauld’s amendments to Burke’s argument. “Radcliffe’s own later critical essay ‘On the Supernatural in Poetry,’” Wright insists, “further refines Barbauld’s aesthetic arguments on terror by drawing a strong

distinction between it and its counterpart, horror.”⁷⁰ A pioneer of the Gothic genre, Radcliffe came to prominence in 1794 after the publication of her groundbreaking and immensely successful book *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. On the heels of Radcliffe’s success authors and publishers across Europe and the United States moved quickly to try to capitalize on the momentum *Udolpho*’s had generated and the escalating popularity of Gothic romance novels. In 1796, Matthew Gregory Lewis would make his own contribution to the canon of the Gothic genre with the publication of *The Monk*. While both Radcliffe and Lewis were widely regarded both as authors in the Gothic tradition, Radcliffe was adamant that her work and Lewis’ work not be misconstrued as kin in either style or method. Troubled by the excessiveness and depravity of Lewis’ work, Radcliffe sought to differentiate the experiences *Udolpho* evoked, with its reliance on the powers of suggestion and subtlety, from the more descriptive and explicit scenes in *The Monk*. Radcliffe insists that a distinction be made between experiences of terror and experiences of horror when she writes, “Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them...and where lies the great difference between horror and terror, but in uncertainty and obscurity, that accompany the first, respecting the dreader evil.” By opposing experiences of terror and experiences of horror, Radcliffe hoped to illustrate that evoking terror through subtly and misdirection permitted a kind of psychic expansion that warmed the imagination to possibility, whereas horror, in all of its ugly explicitness, freezes and annihilates this possibility from the mind.⁷¹

An inquiry into the etymologies of horror and terror reveal Radcliffe’s distinctions did not necessarily cohere with the general meaning of these terms at the time. The earliest entry for horror in English dates back to the late thirteenth century as it described sensations of roughness or nauseousness of taste as in the phrase, “oversharpe, too bitter, or of a greate horroure.” This sense of the word remained consistent until the late seventeenth century. By the middle of the sixteenth century horror begins losing its sense of roughness and becomes more firmly associated with physical sensations and bodily response, especially as a symptom of disease. By the early 18th century, “Horroure ...among physicians [was] taken for a shivering and trembling of the Skin over the whole Body, with a chillness after it.” Horror retained its use as a descriptor for medical symptoms until as late as the early nineteenth century where in *Good’s Study of Medicine* the following hypothetical diagnosis can be found: “The first attack generally commences with a horror.” This use of horror has since fallen out of use, but illustrates the strong link horror has had to the body outside the sphere of literature, wherein the meaning of horror has (apparently) remained generally consistent over the past six centuries. Since the late fourteenth century horror has come to mean, “a painful emotion compounded of loathing and fear; a shuddering with terror and repugnance; strong aversion mingled with dread; the feeling excited by something shocking or frightful.” As early as the middle of the seventeenth century horror also comes to mean “a feeling of awe or reverent fear (without any suggestion of repugnance); a thrill of awe, or imaginative fear.” Not surprisingly, this use of horror is found almost exclusively in a theological context and usually implies reverence to the thought of God.⁷²

Terror also dates back to the late-fourteenth century as it was used to describe “a state of being terrified or greatly frightened; intense fear, fright or dread.” Terror was also indicative of any “action or quality of causing dread or terribleness.” The use of terror in

this sense appears consistent across a wide range of writing from fiction and biblical verse, as well as juridical and political rhetoric. Aside from being woefully inadequate, what is most striking about the etymology of terror is the tautologically recursive use of the word to define itself. To describe terror as an action causing “terribleness” or as a state of being “terrified” does little to bring one any closer toward understanding the feelings this term means to define. The etymology for horror, although a bit more specific, is also rather vague in its definition as it mixes various sensations such as fear, dread, loathing, repugnance, and most astonishingly terror, together rather than defining horror as a unique experiential phenomenon. It appears that only after the emergence of Gothic literature are the meanings of terror and horror argued for more rigorously, ironically enough, spurred by a confusion with one another – or at least a desire to not confuse the two.

In spite of an apparent split in the Gothic genre between “the craft of terror” and “Chambers of horror,” a clear delineation between points of difference in the two modes appears for the most part to have been abandoned by scholars until the publication of Devendra Varma’s *The Gothic Flame* (1957). Varma insists there were “two distinct streams of the Gothic novel”: on the one hand there was “the craft of terror” practiced almost exclusively by Radcliffe and on the other hand there were “chambers of horror” reflected in the work of Lewis and his contemporaries, Beckford, Shelley and Godwin.⁷³ Following Radcliffe’s lead, Varma also insists a sharp distinction be made between terror and horror. Varma claims, “The difference between Terror and Horror is the difference between awful apprehension and sickening realization: between the smell of death and stumbling against a corpse.”⁷⁴ After some elaboration, Varma eventually articulates this difference by stating,

Terror...creates an intangible atmosphere of spiritual psychic dread, a certain superstitious shudder at the other world. Horror resorts to a cruder presentation of the macabre: by an exact portrayal of the physically horrible and revolting, against a far more terrible background of spiritual gloom and despair. Horror appeals to sheer dread and repulsion, by brooding upon the gloomy and the sinister, and lacerates the nerves by establishing actual cutaneous contact with the supernatural...⁷⁵

Several years after the appearance of Varma’s book, Gothic scholar Robert Hume attempts to add a finer point to Varma’s argument. In an influential article (“Gothic vs. Romantic: A Reevaluation of the Gothic Novel”) published in *PMLA* in 1969, Hume suggests the difference between ideas of horror and terror in the Gothic novel reside not simply in the obscurity of terror (Radcliffe) and the graphic explicitness of horror (Lewis), but in establishing a tonal difference between the two, “the suspense of external circumstance is de-emphasized [in the case of terror] in favor of increasing psychological concern with moral ambiguity [in the case of horror].”⁷⁶

Two years later and one edition removed critic Robert Platzner publishes a response to Hume in *PMLA* in 1971. Platzner takes issue with the scholarship of the time concerning horror and terror in the Gothic tradition and the insistence of critics like Varma and Hume in demarcating the experiences of terror and horror. In his article he returns to Radcliffe’s *Udolpho* and offers a close reading of several passages as a way of

illustrating how sensations of terror are not as far removed from sensations of horror in her landmark work as scholars insist. In direct reference to moments from *Udolpho*, Platzner writes,

Terror is not merely a syndrome of delusions...but rather the subjective mirroring of an objective state. Reality is alien, menacing, whether the footsteps heard upon the secret passageway be real or imaginary. It is the discovery that evil is constitutive of reality, that it can never be reduced to a hallucinatory fantasy or to a form of social pathology that renders the Gothic Romance so ultimately sinister – even lurid.⁷⁷

Platzner sees a fluid continuity between the paranoiac imaginings of dread and evil envisioned by *Udolpho*'s heroines and the graphic events that are materialized in the pages of *The Monk*. He further insists,

Lewis' marginally pornographic Romance is but an actualizing of the incipient or imagined horrors of an Emily or an Adeline [characters from *Udolpho*]. Put another way, the paranoiac apprehensions of the Radcliffean heroine become the real crimes of an Ambrosio [hero of *The Monk*], no slight distinction to be sure. But transcending even such a distinction is the undeniable *presence of evil*, whether manifest as free-floating dread or demonic temptation.⁷⁸

For Platzner the question concerning the Gothic novel is not whether we are in the register of terror or the register of horror, but that the characters (and readers by extension) are confronted by the presence of evil. He deems the categorical division of terror and horror specious and contends it is often the case that experiences of terror and horror are only separated by a “hairbreadth,” which is not to say there is no distinction to be made between the two, but, more pointedly, the categories are not as rigid as scholars like Varma and Hume make them out to be.

Questions concerning terror and horror in the Gothic tradition were widely debated throughout the 70s by authors, scholars and critics. In his study of the Gothic period, *Romantic Gothic Tales*, scholar G. Richard Thompson observes, “The Gothic romance seeks to create an atmosphere of dread by combining terror with horror and mystery.”⁷⁹ More specifically, he goes on further to make the following distinction between terror and horror,

Terror suggests the frenzy of physical and mental fear of pain, dismemberment, and death...Horror suggests the perception of something evil or morally repellent. Mystery suggests something beyond this, the perception of a world that stretches away beyond the range of human intelligence—often morally incomprehensible—and thereby productive of a nameless apprehension that may be called religious dread in the face of the wholly other. When in Gothic literature this sense of mystery is joined with terror

or horror, the effects of each expand beyond ordinary fear or repugnance.⁸⁰

Thompson introduces “mystery” as a third term into the debate, whereas in previous arguments (of the Radcliffean kind) mystery had been subsumed under the heading of terror. A sense of mystery for Thompson is something psychically and spiritually expansive beyond the range of immediate perceptions. Only after a sense of mystery is joined to terror or horror do either of these experiences motion toward some feeling of transcendence in the idea of a “nameless apprehension that may be called religious dread in the face of the wholly other.”

In *The Roots of Horror in the Fiction of H.P. Lovecraft*, Barton Levi St. Armand picks up on Radcliffe’s sense of horror as an annihilating experience and extends the possibility of emotional annihilation to terror, making his distinction between terror and horror on account of the way in which each annihilates the spirit. St. Armand writes,

Terror expands the soul outward; it leads us to or engulfs us in the sublime, the immense, the cosmic. We are, as it were, lost in the ocean of fear or plunged directly into it, drowning of our dread. What we lose is the sense of self. That feeling of ‘awe’ which traditionally accompanies intimations of the sublime, links terror with experiences that are basically religious in nature, like those annihilating confrontations with the numinous that Otto explores in *The Idea of the Holy*. Horror is equally annihilating, but from a dramatically different direction. Horror overtakes the soul from the inside; consciousness shrinks or withers from within, and the self is not flung into the exterior ocean of awe but sinks in its own bloodstream, choked by the alien salts of its inescapable prevertebrate heritage.⁸¹

St. Armand understands terror and horror to be equally annihilating experiences, but makes a distinction whereby terror becomes an experience of an external nature linked so forcefully to a sense of awe and the sublime one loses one’s self in the experience. Horror, on the other hand, freezes the soul “from the inside” and corrodes it to the depth of one’s being.

This external/internal dichotomy between terror and horror is crucial to understanding how they are experientially separated. Linda Bayer-Berenbaum offers some useful remarks on the differences between terror and horror when she asserts that, “both involve fear and repulsion, but terror is more immediate, more emotional, and less intellectual. You may be horrified by what your friend tells you but terrified by what you see yourself.”⁸² What is implied by Bayer-Berenbaum pointing to the immediacy of terror, as a more emotional and less intellectual experience, is a definition of terror as a sudden and reaction-oriented response. This understanding of terror as an externally spatial experience can be gainfully set against remarks from writer Philip Van Doren Stern who, among his contemporaries, offers the most lucid insights on the nature of horror. In his celebrated introduction to Arthur Machen’s *Tales of Horror and the Supernatural*, Philip Van Doren Stern insightfully contributes to the horror/terror debate when he writes,

Horror and fear [terror], although of the same family and often mistaken for each other, are not identical. Unlike fear [terror], which [though sudden] can be of long duration, horror is necessarily climactic in effect. The mind can stand only so much, then its protecting agencies quickly come to their rescue and benumb the nerves. Thus it will be seen that horror transcends fear [terror] and is even more powerful. The word has been used too loosely. There is no horror, for instance, about a corpse, no matter how unpleasant it may look. Nothing substantial can be truly horrible; it may, by some odd quirk of association, inspire horror, but horror itself can be found only within ourselves. It is rooted in the imagination rather than in anything in the external world.⁸³

Here a crucial distinction between horror and terror comes into view. Terror is described as an emotionally charged and immediately external event; horror, by Van Doren Stern's account, is experienced within the mind to such an extreme degree other psychic agencies are necessarily called upon to "benumb the nerves." It is vital to Van Doren Stern's insights that some repulsive object, like a corpse, is in no way horrifying in-itself. It is possible that a corpse may inspire horror through a very particular chain of associations, but horror is an experience that is bound not to the immediacy of reaction, it is instead a product of reflective thought. His insistence that "horror itself can be found only within ourselves" affirms the suggestion made by St. Armand that "horror overtakes the soul from the inside."

Recent scholarship has shown an interest in returning again to the origins of the matter. In *Gothic Bodies: The Politics of Pain in Romantic Fiction* (1994) Steven Bruhm links Radcliffe's aesthetic distancing from horror back to Burke's arguments, comparing their uses of horror and terror. "Terror, then," Bruhm writes, "is that carefully regulated aesthetic experience that can use intense feelings to seek objects in the world, objects which can include people in distress. Conversely, horror 'contracts, freezes and nearly annihilates' the passions which lead to community, and forces the horrified spectator to enclose and protect the self." Bruhm argues that Radcliffe's "positive horror" is categorically the same as Burke's notion of absolute pain in that both elicit a self-protecting response. It could then be said that Radcliffe's distinction between terror and horror is analogous to Burke's distinction between society and self-preservation. As Bruhm puts it, "Terror situates us in the social world, the world of the outside, while horror freezes us within the self."

The arguments proposing that terror is an external phenomenon and horror is an internal phenomenon seem to me to be the strongest. From the horror/terror debate in Gothic literature one can deduce that horror and terror are not necessarily mutually exclusive experiences, but they certainly designate radically different phenomena. As James Joyce has said, "Terror is the feeling which arrests the mind in the presence of whatsoever is grave and constant in human suffering and unites it with the cause." This definition of terror chimes with St. Armand's suggestion that "terror expands the soul outward" and Platzner's suggestion that terror is the "subjective mirroring of an objective state;" or Thompson's suggestion that terror is inspired when confronted with the threat

of physical pain, dismemberment, or death, or Bruhm's suggestion that terror is linked to "objects in the world." The linking element in each of these conceptions of terror is the sense of a split or a divide between the experiencing self or the feeling body, and the objective presence of the "whatsoever" thing that inspires this response. Terror is thus a feeling evoked when in the presence of an immediate, objective threat, or being co-present with a threat that is believed to hold the objective possibility of producing physical pain, dismemberment or death. Rethinking Kracauer's analogy, this is the situation in which Perseus finds himself as he remains in the physical proximity of the Gorgon Medusa. Thus, the physical confrontation between Perseus and Medusa is not horrific; it is terrifying.

Conversely, the feeling of horror is consistently defined as an internal response. Dating back to Radcliffe's conception of horror it has been described as a feeling that freezes or contracts the soul from within. Bruhm's book appears two centuries after Radcliffe's initial formulation of the problem and the conclusions are seemingly unchanged. What remains consistent about the understanding of horror over this period of time is that horror overtakes the individual from the inside, as in St. Armand's suggestion that consciousness withers from within, and "the self is not flung into the exterior ocean of awe, but sinks into its own bloodstream." This formulation is consonant with Platzner's suggestion that horror derives from the discovery that evil is constitutive of reality, a conclusion also supported by Thompson's belief that horror is derived from the perception of evil that results in feeling a "nameless apprehension...in the face of the wholly other." But in the course of this debate, Van Doren Stern best articulates the internal nature of horror and its clear demarcation from terror when he insists that nothing substantial – an objective, physical thing – can inspire horror; "Horror itself can only be found within ourselves. It is rooted in the imagination rather than anything in the external world." John Carpenter's insight that there are two types of horror films and the more difficult ones to make are those that try to envision "the evil inside our own human hearts" now comes into clearer focus. What Carpenter may have been touching upon without precisely expressing it in these terms is the separation between terror and horror.

There also seems to be a rich, unexplored relationship between horror and the sublime. Horror as an internal experiential phenomenon recalls the kind of mental activity Kant once referred to as the *supersensible* character of the mind (the recognition of the mind's capacity for thinking as such). For Kant the supersensible character of the mind is a necessary condition for the sublime, or to put it in more precise terms, "what is sublime is the mind itself in its supersensible aspects."⁸⁴ Horror, like the sublime, alerts the mind to its conceptual capacities at times when the scope of sensory experience becomes so immense as to make the very activity of thought a part of sensory experience. Kant wished to emphasize the link between the feeling of the sublime and beauty, though it seems clear that not only objects and experiences of beauty inspire the sublime.

Citing Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, philosopher Peter McCormick, in his book *The Negative Sublime*, defines the sublime as:

An experience wherein some perceptually, imaginatively, or emotionally overwhelming aspect of the sensible world serves to make the scope of specific human capacities vivid to the senses. The ground of our pleasure here consists . . .

of a felt harmony between the sensible world and our cognitive capacities or creative abilities.⁸⁵

For McCormick this working definition touches upon, but does not adequately account for, the types of feelings one might have when confronted with objects or experiences within a register of negativity that is similar to Kant's sublime. Alternatively, McCormick defines the negative sublime as:

An experience of a negative sublime is a realization of the supersensible character of the mind in the ineluctable and necessarily ever frustrated attempts to understand what philosophical reason can neither properly apprehend nor properly ignore, namely the overwhelming magnitude...of suffering and moral evil in times like ours."⁸⁶

McCormick uses the term "negative sublime" for experiences related to a special class of objects and perceptions that would seem to inspire the sublime in the absence of beauty. He recognizes that there is a distinction between rational and aesthetic ideas of the sublime, negative or otherwise, and he attempts to synthesize these seemingly divergent ideas. Clearly more invested in what he sees as Kant's second working definition of the sublime, McCormick offers these insights,

The ethical idea of what is at stake in philosophical reflection on the warfare of our own times at the end of this bloodiest of centuries may be taken as a negative sublime, an aesthetic idea full of the intimations of the overwhelming powers of a radical evil and of the whispering vastness of the still unthought immensities of human suffering, a dark kind of sublime then, both an unfulfillable desire of reason and an ineradicable mark of the spirit.⁸⁷

McCormick's thoughts here chime readily with epigraphs found in the opening pages of Eric Hobsbawm's *The Age of Extremes*. As noted in the previous chapter, Hobsbawm begins his book by quoting authors asked to look back upon the twentieth century, all of whom are trying to both grasp and articulate the "unthinkability" of the violence that has taken place in recent history. From this passage there are two points that are essential to understanding the relation between horror and the sublime. The first point that needs emphasis is McCormick's suggestion that the twentieth century has been one long chronicle of bloodshed and warfare and that the unthought immensities of suffering demands that we meet face to face a dark kind of sublime. It was noted in chapter 2 that many of the prominent horror filmmakers of the modern period cite the Vietnam War as a motivation for their use of the horror genre to express social, cultural and political disillusionment. It is essential that the relationship between warfare and the forms of violence it has spawned throughout the twentieth century be considered if we are to understand how scenes of horror have now permanently entered the collective psychic space of human memory.

Secondly, in the same sense that Van Doren Stern insists that horror transcends fear and is even more powerful, or that horror can only be found within ourselves, McCormick's repositioning of the Kantian sublime within the field of negativity is consonant in fundamental ways with arguments for the internal nature of horror.

McCormick's belief that the negative sublime is only accessible through "reflection" situates horror not in the external world of physical objects, but instead drawn into the interior state of recollection. He also aligns his thoughts on the sublime within the field of aesthetics when he refers to the dark side of the sublime as a "whispering vastness," and consequently expands upon the dividing characteristics between horror and terror. We might say that as Burke's work on the relationship between terror and the sublime set into motion important reevaluations of how we experience aesthetic negativity as pleasurable, a consideration of horror and the sublime, or rather horror *as* the sublime, provides a new framework to guide thinking about the complicated intersections between violence, warfare, ethics, aesthetic pleasure, relationality and, of course, horror and terror. It is against this background that the distinctions between horror and terror in cinema come further into view.

II. The Absent Center of Violence

Michael Haneke's *Benny Video* (1992) – the second installment in his *Vergletscherungs-Trilogie* (glaciation trilogy)– offers itself as a particularly useful starting point for an examination of the "horror" film in the context of post-Wall European art cinema, not only because it exhibits the four motifs identified in chapter 2 that specify the horror of Raymond's crimes in *Spoorloos* and Henry's crimes in *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* (negative curiosity, contingency, the stranger, the banality of evil), but because it also establishes with great clarity the essential function of absence and repetition in feelings of horror. In the opening sequence of *Benny's Video* a hog is led by the snout and tail from the inside of a dark barn through a doorway opening on to a muddy courtyard. The scene is shot with a grainy handheld Hi8 video recorder as the cameraman, unknown to us, follows several steps behind the squealing hog being led to slaughter. The hog is stopped and held tightly by two pig farmers as a third farmer places a high-pressure pellet gun flush against the hog's head, killing it with a single shot. The hog collapses, blood gushes from the wound as it convulses from the shock cascading through its nervous system. The camera looks on unflinchingly. Suddenly, the image freezes and begins rewinding back to a moment just prior to the pellet being fired into the hog's skull. It is apparent now that we are not watching a first order diegetic sequence, but rather a second order video recording of a diegetic sequence. The rewinding of the image stops and the sequence replays in slow motion. This time when the pellet is fired the sound of the shot, like rolling thunder, resonates with a deep echoing rumble on the soundtrack. By slowing the image down a finer grain of detail to this violence comes into the foreground: noticeable now are the hog's eyes bugging out just as the trigger is squeezed, its limbs seize and stiffen as it is tipped over on its right side, also noticeable is the hog's tongue limply slipping and hanging out of its mouth as it begins convulsing.



Figure 1: From left to right: Hog is a moment away from death; video image rewinds back through hog's killing to the moment before the gun is fired; hog's killing is repeated in slow motion.

This sequence is a synecdoche for the whole system of Haneke's film and its iterational strategy of returning to or remediating scenes of violence, which illustrates an important, yet often intractable dimension of cinematic violence. In these images where an act of violence is presented then re-presented again so that we pass from life to death, from death back to life, then life to death again, the conditions for feeling horror *proper* through cinema emerge. The immediacy of the violence and its presentation in the flow of cinematic time establishes a sense of simultaneity between the audience and the violent event on screen; in other words we are co-present with the events of the sequence. After the repetition of the scene through video playback our relation to the violence on-screen develops an uncanny quality as we watch the pig that was a moment ago killed brought back to life only to be killed again. This kind of unreliable narration serves a strategic function for Haneke as it destabilizes the passive position of the "spectator" and demands that the audience become *participants* with the film in deciphering the disruption of the *mise en scene*.

Near the mid-point of the film we discover that the unknown camera operator is Benny, the film's central character. Benny is a teenage boy and son of upper-class parents living in Vienna. Benny has been afforded every material desire by his parents, and yet it is equally clear that he is disconnected from them in any meaningful way. One day Benny brings a stranger (a young girl who is unmistakably of less affluence) from his local video store back to his apartment. Benny shows the stranger his stunning array of technological gadgetry, they eat pizza, and Benny plays a video for her.



Figure 2: From left to right: Benny shows the stranger his room. The blinds are closed and the view outside is mediated through a camera pointing out of the window hooked to a monitor; Benny plays the hog killing video on his television for the stranger.

The video Benny shows the girl is the same hog killing video from the film's opening sequence. After the hog is killed on his television monitor, Benny uses his remote to stop

the video and rewind it before playing it again for the girl in slow motion. Here, again, is a moment of repetition as it becomes clear the opening sequence was culled from a scene later in the film. Soon after Benny shows the girl the video he presents her with the pellet gun that was used to kill the pig. Benny provocatively loads a pellet into the chamber of the gun and places the end of the barrel against his chest. He tells the girl to pull the trigger. She refuses and Benny responds by calling her a coward. Benny then turns the pellet gun around and points it at the girl who, in turn, repeats Benny's gesture by commanding him to pull the trigger. When he does not comply she also replies "coward," but in the next moment Benny pulls the trigger, shooting the girl in the stomach. She screams and lurches toward a wall. Benny begins panicking. As the following events unfold we see them mediated through Benny's television, which is connected to his Hi8 video camera that is recording what we see. Benny shoots the girl a second time who squeals just as the hog squealed before it was shot. Finally, Benny shoots the girl a third time, killing her.



Figure 3: From left to right: Benny tells the stranger to shoot him; Benny kills the stranger as seen in one of Benny's video monitors.

In each instance of repetition we view the violence differently or it is mediated through a screen and placed at a further remove from reality. A similar kind of repetition and separation is expressed in the above epigraph from Kracauer when he says the film is Athena's polished shield. The reflection of Medusa in Perseus' shield is the doubling of her image; the mediation of her image on a "screen" that makes it possible to experience the violence of her gaze as a distancing effect. But there is a problem with Kracauer's formulation: what the film provides is not a reflection of Medusa in a shield. In this analogy Perseus is co-present with the threatening object reflected. The presence of the reflected figure in his shield, though unseen in the flesh, irreducibly imposes its proximity upon him. There is still the imminent threat and danger posed by the proximity of Medusa to Perseus. In a more radical formulation it would be better said that the film is the image of Medusa in Perseus's shield were she not co-present with him in the flesh. In this hypothetical formulation where there is an *impossible reflection* of an object that is not really there, but may have been there at one time or another, a new relation is forged with the temporality of the image. It is either the impression of an object that was once there, but is not there now, or it is an *impossible reflection* of an object that was never there to begin with, but appears regardless.

The confrontation between Perseus and Medusa as a metaphor for cinematic experience helps to illuminate the distinction between horror and terror. The scenes of repetition in *Benny's Video* call attention to how these degrees of separation can inspire horror. The encounter between Perseus and Medusa and the drama of presence and

absence it illustrates usefully metaphorizes the distinction I wish call attention to between the violence of the modern American horror film and the violence of the continental horror film. The violence in the American horror film almost invariably draws upon the presence of a threat and the violence represented by the threat for the feelings it inspires. In the juggernaut serial killer films (*Halloween*, *Friday the 13th*, *Nightmare on Elm Street*, etc.) it is the play between the appearance and disappearance of the killer and the constant sense of the looming presence of the killer's violence that advances the narrative. This is the scene of terror. Terror is bound to presence through an imminent or immediate threat. The violence in *Benny's Video* operates not through the force of presence, but rather through the force of absence.

To illustrate how absence in cinema can function in the production of horror consider the aftermath of the stranger's murder in *Benny Video*. Benny is seen doing his homework, making food, and planning an evening out with friends, all as if nothing out of the ordinary has occurred. Intermittently, Benny works on soaking up the blood from the floor of his room with bath towels while dragging the stranger's corpse toward his



Figure 4: Benny videotapes the stranger's corpse.

closet where he will stash her remains until his parents return home from a brief trip. After Benny screens the murder for his parents, Benny's father takes possession of the tape and begins to coolly rationalize all available options. The decision is eventually made that Benny's father will break apart and atomize the stranger's body into pieces small enough to flush down

the toilet. During this grisly affair, Benny and his mother will vacation in Egypt under the pretense of attending a family funeral. While Benny and his mother are away, Benny, the amateur filmmaker of sorts, videotapes their comings and goings: parasailing, guided tours, and open-air lunches at local cafes. Benny and his mother even take time to record a "wish you were here" message for Benny's father who is back home and no doubt occupied. Haneke's strategy here is very effective. The temporality of Benny and his mother luxuriating on their holiday travels directly overlaps the temporality of the stranger's destruction and physical erasure back in the family apartment. Both of these events are absolutely essential to this period of narrative time, yet only one is made visually available. Haneke never cross-cuts the vacation with the scene of the girl's dismemberment and erasure. Instead, he leaves the unimaginable to our imaginations.

When Benny and his mother return from Egypt, Benny's father picks them up from the airport and brings them home. They ride up the elevator of their building idly chatting and when they enter the space of the home it is immaculate. As Benny and his parents re-enter the apartment, Haneke provocatively uses similar shot selections to those

used when Benny brought the stranger home.



Figure 6: From left to right: Benny's room upon returning from Egypt. Now the blinds are open and the video monitor is off; Benny casually brushing his teeth in the immaculately white bathroom where the stranger's body was destroyed and flushed away in his absence.

Benny looks in his room and in his closet and there is not so much as a trace of anything violent having occurred. That night we see Benny brushing his teeth in the same bathroom in which the girl was mutilated, now clinically pristine, and as he goes to bed his father tells him that there is nothing to worry about then asks him about the murder: "Why did you do it?" He asks. Benny responds, "I wanted to see what it's like."



Figure 7: Father and son bonding.

What we have here is not a serial killer of the kind found in *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* or *Spoorloos*, but rather, in Mark Seltzer's words, a serial killer as a type of person. *Benny's Video* and the other films in the glaciation trilogy (*Der siebente Kontinent* [The Seventh Continent], 1989; *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls* [71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance], 1994) depict eruptions of violence between people (often strangers) within the most banal and socially contingent circumstances. These films reveal that any individual regardless of class, social status, or education, is capable of any degree of violence no matter how horrific. This is how the rise of the serial killer as a type of cinematic figure in the horror film initiates a shift from its second phase to its third phase.

In her slim volume *On Violence*, Hannah Arendt expands upon Walter Benjamin's thoughts on the means and ends of violence when she argues that violence must necessarily be distinguished from power.⁸⁸ "Violence," Arendt says, "is by nature instrumental; like all means, it always stands in need of guidance and justification through the end it pursues. And what needs justification by something else cannot be the essence of anything." Thus, power is an absolute; ultimately, it is an end in itself. As

Arendt puts it, “The power structure itself precedes and outlasts all aims, so that power, far from being a means to an end, is actually the very condition enabling a group of people to think and act in terms of the means-end category.”⁸⁹ The key idea she means to convey is that, “the very substance of violent action is ruled by the means-end category, whose chief characteristic, if applied to human affairs, has always been that the end is in danger of being overwhelmed by the means which it justifies and which are needed to reach it.”⁹⁰

Arendt’s insights play an important role in shaping Cavarero’s views on contemporary violence. In a summary of Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Cavarero notes that Arendt develops the notion of “total terror” in the course of illuminating the point of divarication, but also the perverse kinship between horror and terror. The term ‘total terror’ names the “paradox of a terror that is no longer strategic, because it has departed from the logic of means and ends.” This kind of terror, Cavarero points out, is no longer useful and is, in fact, counterproductive at its limit, and in this sense, “total terror,” as a means to an end, is inexplicable. As Arendt develops her notion of “total terror,” it is not long before her thinking drifts into the realm of horror as she compiles a list of historical examples – the extermination of native peoples by colonizers, massacres of hostile populations, the concentrations camps of Nazi Germany – she notes that past the limit of ‘total terror,’ perspectives on violence change when it becomes evident that “everything is permitted.” Cavarero makes the crucial observation that there is another shift that moves us even further from the realm of ‘total terror’ into the cosmos of horror and radical evil: “that of going beyond the principle ‘that everything is permitted’ to embrace and activate the unprecedented principle that ‘everything is possible.’” The Lager, for Arendt, is the paramount example of this principle in which “total terror,” meaning terror that is without purpose and is no longer utilized to strike fear into people, coincides with horror in the extreme. Arendt insists that, through the experiences of victim and perpetrator in the extermination camps, “its horror can never be fully embraced by the imagination for the very reason that it stands outside of life and death.”

Cavarero’s efforts to name contemporary violence by arguing that in special cases when the end that violence seeks is eclipsed by the means used to pursue it, drawing a distinction between horror and terror and understanding the forms of violence these categories of experience refer to reveals that contemporary violence has seemingly left the sphere of terror and entered the realm of horror. In her description of suicide bombing in Iraq, Cavarero points out that in a violent event the position of perpetrator and the position of victim yield incongruent perspectives as each interprets the violent event from different realms of experience. Regardless of how the perpetrator’s deeds are conceptualized (the positivistic “martyr” or the negative valence of the “terrorist”) Cavarero rightly points out that the violence is framed within the logic of means and ends, which is to say that the terrorist’s violence is given a horizon of meaning: it is either deemed to be a necessary course of action toward bringing a desire to fruition or forms part of a larger strategy. Just as Cavarero erects her critique of contemporary violence upon the ground of a distinction between horror and terror and insists that contemporary violence erupting out of political and ideological conflicts between nations has now precipitated a shift in violence from the arena of terror to the realm of horror, a similarly

productive argument can be made for the violence that both links and separates the modern American horror film from the continental horror film.

The distribution of meaning within a film shapes audience perceptions of on-screen violence. In order to make this clear some points need to be made about the nature of violence. When it is most apparent that violent acts serve a greater purpose – however misguided that purpose may seem – the substance of violence is perceived to be meaningful, and when violence is deemed to have meaning or purpose, violence is understood as a means toward an end. Violence, as a means toward an end, is premeditated and strategic and is thus in alignment with the function of terror. Terror is both purposeful and meaningful in its close homology to speech acts and the logic of communication. Conversely, when violent acts appear to be without purpose or when violence is perceived to be meaningless, violence is reduced to pure means without ends or, as it were, an end in itself. Horror separates itself from terror on this account. Horror is the absent center of violence when it appears to lack purpose and meaning, to lack substance, and to the extent that it wishes to not only destroy rhetoric and the tools of communication, but to destroy communication altogether.

Structures of Violence

Violence is of central significance to the horror film, but in the critical literature on the genre it is curious that violence itself has been singled out so seldom for special consideration. Genre scholars tend to focus on anxiety and the presence of a threat as the horror film's imperative. In these discussions the horror genre is seen as a repository of anxiety and it is therefore taken to be the horror genre's basis, its structural and narrational center of gravity, as well as its persistent focus. Paul Wells opens his book on the horror genre by asserting that, "The history of the horror genre is essentially a history of anxiety in the twentieth century."⁹¹ A survey of the critical literature on the horror film since the late-70s, when critical analysis of the horror genre first became a respectable object for scholarly attention, appears to corroborate Wells' viewpoint. The anxieties of the atomic age figure prominently in Vivian Sobchack's history of the American science fiction film in her book *Screening Space*; in *Hollywood From Vietnam to Reagan*, Robin Wood, using Freud's notion of "the return of the repressed," argues that the modern American horror film reflects the broad cultural anxieties of American culture in the wake of the Vietnam War and Watergate, and Andrew Tudor's very thorough history of the horror genre in *Monsters and Mad Scientists* also illustrates that anxiety has been a dominant theme of the horror film since its inception.

In its inscription at the level of representation or its suggestion through metaphor or analogy, anxiety has consistently underwritten the sudden and unexpected appearance of the Monster, its acts of aggression, and its broader societal implications. In the horror movies of the three decades spanning 1930 to 1960, anxiety is most forcefully linked to the twin poles of science and supernature with the threat invariably being posed from the outside. In the genre's next three decades – the period of the post-1960s modern horror film – the threat is relocated from the exterior space of the outside world to the interior space of the family home and the human psyche. As Tudor claims, "In these years the horror movie begins to articulate a radically different type of anxiety."⁹² In this transition from the first phase to the second phase of the horror film paranoia around the potential

threat of outside entities and fear of the other is gradually displaced by a profound insecurity about ourselves, and increasingly imperiling forces are found to be among us, if not already residing within us.

For Tudor this persistent sense of a “threat” is central to the horror film as it is the nature of the threat that dictates the forms of anxiety represented. Tudor identifies threat as the nucleus for his analysis of the horror genre for two reasons: “The first,” he writes, “is because...the ‘threat’ is *the* central feature of horror movie narrative, the organizing principle around which all else revolves. The other is because if we are ultimately concerned with the different kinds of fears articulated in these movies, then it is in relation to the ‘threat’ that the most general trends will become apparent.”⁹³ It is important, though, to recognize that a threat in a horror film is not a free-floating feeling that is generalized and static. There are shades and degrees to which a thing might be perceived to be threatening.

For example, the birds in Hitchcock’s eponymous film at first elicit the concern of characters after their initial, inexplicable attacks and their increasing numbers around Bodega Bay. Early in the film there is a sense of concern and a vague sense of a threat, but no one makes an effort to avoid or retreat from the birds’ presence. By the time we reach the mid-point of the film when the birds are chasing the school children down the street from the schoolyard, the nature of the threat has grown considerably; its intensity has gone from annoyance to a matter of life and death. Therefore, what characters understand to be threatening and how characters have reordered their responses to threats must be seen as fluid and continuously changing.

Take as another example the final showdown in John Carpenter’s *Halloween*. As Michael Myers goes on his rampage through his old neighborhood the sense of threat in the film is at high pitch, but at the film’s conclusion after Laurie stabs Michael Meyers in the eye and he lies seemingly dead and defeated on the bedroom floor, the sense of threat in the film diminishes considerably, to such a degree she remains seated on the floor in the same room breathing sighs of relief. The sense of threat is seemingly diffused. Then Michael Meyers sits up behind Laurie and when she sees that he is still alive the threat spikes back to its highest pitch. These examples illustrate how the nature of the threat and how its perception inside and outside of the diegesis is constantly in a state of flux.

From the perspective of an anxiety and threat-based critique it can be seen that a radical redistribution of anxiety and threat marks the transition from the first phase to the second phase of the horror film. Given the emphasis that has been placed on the role of anxiety it is no wonder why most serious considerations of the modern horror film across a spectrum of theoretical approaches ranging from feminism to structuralism, narrative analysis to genre theory, have been worked out in the language of psychoanalysis. While the horror film has been a reliable barometer of anxiety in the twentieth century, especially in the case of the American cinema, it is erroneous to think that the history of the “horror” genre is reducible to anxiety or threat alone. While it is debatable whether or not all horror films in the twentieth century express the anxieties of their time or hinge upon the presence of a threat, what is not debatable is that every horror film, without exception, shares violence as a common denominator.

Horizons of Terror: Three Methods of Conferring Meaning on Violence

Generic “horror” film narratives disburden audiences of the moral and ethical problems of screening violence through explanatory strategies that lend plausibility and meaning to the killer’s actions. Since the emergence of the modern American horror film there have been three dominant narrative strategies for conferring meaning upon violence in the “horror” genre: supernatural, pathology, and revenge.

Supernature

In “supernature” films the monster(s) or the threat is represented as an otherworldly phenomenon. For example, in George Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), the dead inexplicably rise from the grave and roam the countryside in search of living flesh to consume; in William Friedkin’s *The Exorcist* (1973), a teenaged girl is possessed by a demonic force; in *Poltergeist* (1982) a family is terrorized by spirits who kidnap their youngest daughter and destroy their home, and in John Carpenter’s *The Thing* (1982), an alien life form is discovered frozen beneath the arctic circle and, after being revived, parasitically attaches itself to host bodies and kills its re-animators.

Pathology

The role of medical and psychological discourse to explain the actions of killers in horror films begins in earnest after Hitchcock’s *Psycho* and its now infamous epilogue where a psychologist diagnoses Norman Bates as a schizophrenic who believes himself to be his dead mother. In subsequent horror films like *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), in which an ostracized family of ex-butchers murder and kidnap teenagers on a road trip through Texas; or Michael Myers in John Carpenter’s *Halloween* (1979), who is committed to an asylum as a young boy after killing his older sister on Halloween night, only to escape the asylum years later and go on a murderous rampage through his old neighborhood while being pursued by his psychotherapist. In the narratives of these “horror” films establishing the mental instability of the killer is essential.

Revenge

In *Friday the 13th* (1980) unsuspecting camp counselors are being mysteriously murdered at Camp Crystal Lake. At the conclusion of the film it is revealed that the killer is the mother of a boy seeking revenge for the death of her son (Jason Voorhees) who had previously attended the camp and drowned as a result of negligence on the part of the counselors. By the end of the film Jason’s mother is killed and in one of the great twists of all the horror films of the modern period the film concludes with an undead Jason erupting from the water and killing one of the surviving counselors. Jason takes revenge for the death of his mother and sets into motion the longest running cycle of revenge based horror film’s in the genre’s history. Freddy Kruger in Wes Craven’s *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984) is also a monster compelled by revenge after being captured, beaten and burned alive by parents in a suburban neighborhood who became aware of his

pedophilic tendencies. Craven's *Last House on the Left* (1972) and Larry Cohen's *Maniac Cop* (1988) are other well-known examples of revenge-themed horror movies.

Through these narrative strategies the killer's violence occurs within a framework that lends plausibility to his/her murderous impulses. However ethically misguided or morally unjustifiable this narrative framework may be, the fact that the violence perpetrated by the monster/killer has been ascribed some meaningful motivation makes its consumption as aesthetic entertainment more palatable. When little Reagan begins spewing obscenities and self-mutilating her genitals with a crucifix in *The Exorcist*, we are cued to understand that demonic possession is responsible for this violence. In *Halloween*, when Michael Myers returns to his boyhood neighborhood and goes on a killing spree, his therapist, Dr. Loomis, repeatedly insists to anyone who will listen that Michael is the most insane individual he has ever encountered, and in *Maniac Cop*, an officer is set up for a crime he did not commit and sent to prison where criminals he was responsible for arresting eventually kill him. He returns as an undead monster in uniform to seek murderous vengeance against his entire precinct.⁹⁴ In these cases, as in every narrative "horror" film of the modern American period without exception, the violence perpetrated by the monster is portrayed as being motivated by purpose or reason; as having a means to an end.

But when the justifications or reasons for the killer's violent acts are diminished or made to seem arbitrary or when there are no reasons given at all, our experience as cinematic participants with these scenes of violence begin to drift away from the immediate, aesthetic possibilities of pleasurable terror toward the more contemplative, metaphysically expansive and "supersensible" feelings of horror (or a negative sublime). This shift in the reception of "horror" genre violence from scenes of terror toward feelings of horror *proper* definitively marks the transition from second phase horror films to third phase horror films.

Because certain words such as "fear," "gothic," or "dread," are common to the description of horror and terror, it may seem the two are less radically antithetical than they are. But the overlapping vocabulary is itself the sign of how absolute the difference is between them, for they share the same language only because the one is an inversion of the other. That is, horror remains after the phenomenal layers of terror have been stripped away. It is a feeling aptly described by the painter Gerhard Richter who, after painting victims of the Holocaust, wrote, "crime fills the world, so absolutely that we could go insane out of sheer despair...our horror, which we feel every time we succumb or are forced to succumb to the perception of atrocity...feeds not only on the fear that it might affect ourselves but on the certainty that the same murderous cruelty operates and lies ready to act within every one of us."⁹⁵ Terror ends at what is horror's starting point. In other words, the very existence of each requires the other's elimination.

Cavarero argues this point in her book *Horrorism* when she recounts the scene of a suicide bombing in the summer of 2005 after a man blew up his automobile in the middle of a crowd in Baghdad. Among the 27 fatalities and scores of victims disfigured, with limbs seeping blood or legs blown off, the greatest number were children who were receiving candy from American soldiers. "Mass murderers of this kind give themselves glorious names: 'martyr' or 'combatant,'" writes Cavarero, noting that in the West perpetrators of such crimes, seen from the other side of the looking glass, are instead called "terrorists." Furthermore, she concludes that while the terms martyr and terrorist

are in opposition, “both labels imply that the massacre forms part of a strategy or simply a means toward a higher end.” But from the perspective of the unsuspecting victim of this attack, an act of violence in which the loss of life or destruction of the physical form is the result of a seeming cast of the die by the hand of contingency, the end melts away and the means become substance. Thus, the scene of human obliteration in which a single perpetrator premeditatedly annihilates anyone who happens to be in his/her vicinity provides a point of illumination for Cavarero that allows her to articulate the separation between horror and terror. As she concludes her thoughts on this violent episode, “More than terror, what stands out is horror.” It is not a coincidence that Cavarero’s description chimes readily with the scene from *Apocalypse Now* discussed in the previous chapter when Kurtz recounts for Willard how, after administering polio vaccines to children in a camp, soldiers cut off the inoculated arms. Kurtz calls the act, “perfect, genuine, complete, crystalline, pure,” and that being able to kill without feeling, passion or judgment brings to light the horrors of warfare.

Cavarero’s observation that the contrasts between terror and horror stand out when the ends that violence seeks melts away and the means of violence become substance crystalizes what is at stake in the shift from the modern American “horror” film to the continental horror film. The transition from the second phase of the horror film to its third phase is precipitated by an incongruity in the means and ends of violence, which is to say, as the moral purpose for violence diminishes, it loses its horizon and becomes pure means – or, in a word, *pure violence*. By framing the distinction between horror and terror as a question related to the means and ends of violence, the continental horror film in contrast to the modern American horror film reveals that what stands out more than terror, is horror.

Chapter 4

Absence, The Other, Relationality

I. The Horror...The Horror

In an August 18th, 2011 online editorial for *The New York Times* titled “Who Spooks the Masters of Horror?” journalist and author Jason Zinoman asks several filmmakers working in the “horror” genre, “What’s the scariest horror movie you’ve seen?” Invariably, each respondent points to the modern period of the American horror film. John Landis (*An American Werewolf in London*) tells Zinoman, “It’s a toss up between *The Exorcist* and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. I was really scared [watching *The Exorcist*, but] the supernatural is not real. [P]sychopaths, cannibals and serial killers are. [*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*] is relentless, and for a film with no real on-screen violence it generates an ambience of true *terror*.” Eric Red (screenwriter of *The Hitcher* and *Near Dark*) also cites *The Exorcist* as the horror film that had the most profound effect on him: “Having a little girl hacking her privates bloody with a crucifix, sticking her mother’s face in it, and then turning her head 180 degrees around is without question the most horrific and transgressive set piece in American horror. That the sequence in *The Exorcist* was staged in broad daylight added to the *terror*...” John Waters (*Serial Mom*) insists, “No film can come near *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*’s snuff-like power to *horrify*.” Ti West (*The Innkeepers*, *The House of The Devil*) along with Guillermo del Toro (*Pan’s Labyrinth*) both cite *The Shining* (1980) as the scariest movie, with West admitting, “The image of those two odd-ball little girls...in their matching powder-blue dresses standing in a bleak, floral-wallpapered hallway has been burnt into my retina ever since the first moment I laid eyes on them.”

In a video companion piece to his article titled “The Horror, The Horror,” (NYTimes.com, Aug. 18, 2011) Zinoman tells us films like *The Exorcist*, *The Shining*, *Halloween*, *Carrie* (1976), and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* all draw upon a sense of the unknown to bring forth and inspire feelings of fear in audiences, “Ambiguity and disorientation that contribute to this sense of the unknown is what’s really *terrifying*.” But he adds, for him, there is a distinction to be made between the best scary movies (the canonical 70s films) and movies that are purely unsettling. Though he marks *Carrie*, *Alien* (1979) and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* as his favorite horror films, Zinoman says the film that scared him the most was *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*, adding: “I’m genuinely *terrified* of that movie [and] nothing focuses the mind more than when you’re *terrified* in a horror movie.”

Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer is a “purely unsettling” film in comparison to other horror films of the modern period, and the seemingly pervasive interchangeability between the feeling of terror and the feeling of horror found in the descriptions that he and the filmmakers he interviews provide. In the latter case, the apparent semantic permeability between horror and terror in the article and video should not be dismissed as mere slippages of everyday speech. An awareness of this distinction between horror and terror and what this distinction precisely entails helps to explain why a film like *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* can be perceived as negatively pleasurable, while a film like

Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer inspires negative feelings that seem to pass beyond this threshold of aesthetic pleasure. The importance of making this distinction can be seen in another compelling way. Zinoman titles his video piece “The Horror, The Horror,” after the infamous final words of Colonel Walter Kurtz from Francis Ford Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now* (1979). In what is certainly the most famous instance in all of cinema in which the word “horror” is uttered, let us recall the context of its use and expand further the separation between horror and terror in cinema.

Handpicked by his superiors in the American military, Army Captain Benjamin Willard (Martin Sheen) is asked to lead a covert operation into the heart of the Cambodian jungle to assassinate a once outstanding, but now rogue, Green Beret Colonel named Walter Kurtz (Marlon Brando). During the course of Willard’s journey he becomes better acquainted with his target through dossier materials provided to him by the CIA. The more Willard reads about Kurtz’s decorated career, the more Willard puzzles over why the American military would want a soldier of Kurtz’s caliber killed, or why a soldier of Kurtz’s pedigree would suddenly go rogue and begin coordinating combat operations on his own with untrained jungle natives. But with each passing day on route to Kurtz’s compound deep in the jungle, Willard bears witness to senseless violence and a uniformly cavalier attitude toward death and destruction by its perpetrators.

In one of the film’s most famous examples of this cavalier attitude toward death and destruction, Willard is escorted to a rendezvous point by Lt. Colonel Bill Kilgore (Robert Duval) who bombs an ocean side Vietnamese village to Wagner’s *Ride of the Valkyries* blasting through loudspeakers chained to the bottom of attack choppers. Kilgore points out that this particular beach is great for surfing and orders the surfers among his infantry to ride the six-foot waves, but some of them voice fears of being hit by sniper fire. Kilgore’s response to this problem is to order a napalm strike that effectively incinerates the surrounding villages and villagers who were living there – a napalm strike for no other reason than to secure the safety of his men who wish to surf. During his journey Willard is increasingly made aware of a sense of encroaching madness taking root in men for whom a growing disparity between the means and ends of violence gives shape to the reality of the Vietnam War.

When Captain Willard arrives at Colonel Kurtz’s compound in the middle of the jungle protected by its natives, it is immediately apparent to Willard that Kurtz’s has entered a psychic space in which his orientation to the world has been radically altered. What has sent Kurtz into a kind of spiritual vertigo is unclear, but Willard has invested mind, body and soul into his mission to kill him and he has no intention of veering from this course of action even in spite of what he has seen in his own journey. It is obvious Kurtz has come to terms with the inevitability of his death. Before Willard completes his mission, Kurtz effectively articulates how warfare has transformed his perceptions of human nature. As Kurtz’s monologue to Willard is surely the most eloquent summation in the history of cinema on how horror is inspired through violence, it is necessary to quote him at length:

I've seen horrors...horrors that you've seen. But you have no right to call me a murderer. You have a right to kill me. You have a right to do that... but you have no right to judge me. It's impossible for words to describe what is necessary

to those who do not know what horror means. Horror... Horror has a face... and you must make a friend of horror. Horror and moral terror are your friends. If they are not, then they are enemies to be feared. They are truly enemies! I remember when I was with Special Forces... We went into a camp to inoculate some children. We left the camp after we had inoculated the children for polio, and this old man came running after us and he was crying. He couldn't see. We went back there, and they had come and hacked off every inoculated arm. There they were in a pile. A pile of little arms. And I remember... I cried, I wept like some grandmother. I wanted to tear my teeth out; I didn't know what I wanted to do! And I want to remember it. I never want to forget it... I never want to forget. And then I realized... like I was shot with a diamond... a diamond bullet right through my forehead. And I thought, my God... the genius of that! The genius! The will to do that! Perfect, genuine, complete, crystalline, pure. And then I realized they were stronger than we, because they could stand that these were not monsters, these were men... These men who fought with their hearts, who had families, who had children, who were filled with love... but they had the strength to do that. If I had ten divisions of those men, our troubles here would be over very quickly. You have to have men who are moral... and at the same time who are able to utilize their primordial instincts to kill without feeling... without passion... without judgment.”

Not long after this monologue, Willard slips into Kurtz's hut under the cover of night and strikes him with several fatal blows from a machete. As Kurtz lies on his back, dying, gazing blankly upward, he musters his famous last whisper: “The horror... the horror.” If we examine Kurtz's monologue and his final words closely we can formulate a conceptual framework for thinking about the ontology of horror.

Kurtz makes it known to Willard that they have both seen and experienced the violence of the Vietnam War and that they share a certain field of experience. This shared experience, a shared knowledge of the horrors of warfare, levels the moral playing field between them. From this perspective, Willard's journey into the jungle to assassinate Kurtz does not corroborate the charge of madness leveled against him by his superiors, but instead reveals that the conditions in which the combatant is immured are fundamentally mad. In the course of Willard's journey, his vision in the present is analogue to Kurtz's vision in the past and Kurtz seems to indicate that he and Willard are inseparably bound by their shared descent, physically and psychically, into the heart of darkness. From this place of ethical correspondence Kurtz makes it known that Willard is in no position to pass judgment, but the logic of violence in which they are both participants rightfully allows that he too should be vulnerable to death. What is apparent here is the similarity between Kurtz and the moral relativism of Raymond in *Spoorloos* when he tells Rex that “you have a right to kill me and I acknowledge your right to do

so.” It seems that inherent in the feeling of horror is some shared range of experience and vulnerability to death that is inflicted not from the hand of moral judgment, but from the hand of primal right. For Rex and Raymond in *Spoorloos* that shared range of experience was channeled through *negative curiosity*; for Willard and Kurtz, the shared range of experience is channeled through a common field of visual experience, a field the viewing audience shares with them when the moment of their face to face encounter arrives.

En route to complete his mission we wonder alongside Willard why Kurtz went rogue. Ironically through the lens of one insane act of violence – the mission to assassinate Kurtz – we are made to understand, in a rather skewed way, how Kurtz might have been driven to “madness.” What is ultimately troubling is not the violence and destruction itself as seen through the eyes of Willard. The horror of the violence resides in the broader systemic logic the acts signify, in the impulse to engage in warfare itself. As Platzner concluded in his distinctions between horror and terror, horror resides in the realization that “evil is constitutive of reality.” In another ironic turn, when Willard finally confronts Kurtz it comes as no surprise that Kurtz is anything but mad. Kurtz’s persona perfectly exemplifies playwright Antonin Artaud’s insights on cruelty when he insists that, “from the point of view of the mind, cruelty signifies rigor, implacable intention and decision, irreversible and absolute determination ... Cruelty is above all lucid.”⁹⁶ The monologue Willard receives from Kurtz evinces his lucidity regarding the violence of which they are both equally perpetrators.⁹⁷

Kurtz tells Willard that it is impossible for words to describe what is necessary to those who do not know what horror means. Here Kurtz’s points to an essential characteristic of horror as an experience that takes root in the failure of language to communicate feelings at the limits of experience. In a chapter titled “War and Representation” from his book *The Antinomies of Realism*, Fredric Jameson declares that in certain instances of defamiliarization or “*ostranenie*,” “warfare is brought before us in all its nameless freshness and horror.”⁹⁸ This is an important point with respect to the distinction between horror and terror. Terror wishes to communicate; terror is the use of violence to communicate fear through the presence of a threat. Through the threat of terror the address of violence is meant to amplify fears that there may be more violence to come. On the other hand, horror is the endgame of the logic of violence and marks the end of communication, verbal or otherwise. It may be possible that horror is inspired through an act of terror (the 9/11 attacks are but one recent example), but horror itself, to use a Radcliffian formulation, freezes and annihilates communicable experience.

This is what Roland Barthes so elegantly explored in *Camera Lucida* when he explained that photographs possess an uncanny capacity to “wound” the observer with some detail contained in the captured image. Barthes refers to these types of details as the photograph’s “*punctum*”: the feeling that some detail within the image has personally touched the observer. Of the many examples Barthes provides in his explanation of the *punctum*, there are two worth recalling here. Barthes reprints a photo taken in the streets of Managua during the Nicaraguan revolution. In the photo there is the corpse of a boy lying in rubble and his mother is grieving over his body. Barthes explains that in images of warfare, which often contain images of death, it is often possible to experience the *punctum*. In this instance the sight of grieving marks, for Barthes, the photograph’s *punctum*. In the second example Barthes does not reprint the photograph but only describes it. The image is of his deceased mother and Barthes goes to great lengths to

narrate his way around how the image “wounds” him, but ultimately the image itself remains foreclosed to us.

I see the *punctum* and the experience of horror as both sharing a certain ontological proximity. Both feelings are characterized by the *over-presence* of some discernible quality in a thing that is itself objectively absent. The *punctum* for Barthes in the image of a mother grieving over her son’s corpse resides somewhere within the relational dimension between mother and child, or rather, the physical destruction of relationality as such. Similarly, Barthes admits that reprinting the photo of his mother which first alerted him to the feeling of the *punctum* would itself be worthless as it is directly related to his orientation toward his mother’s death and the personal, involuntary memories the photograph activates. It is a feeling only he is able to access.

The photograph belongs to the order of representation. If contemplative reflection also belongs to the order of representation (the re-presentation of things to consciousness called up from memory), then Kurtz’s final words would seem to align horror with the field of representation, which firmly situates horror within the field of memory and interiority. Just as Barthes offers discourse in lieu of the absent image, as Kurtz lays dying, eyes wide shut, whispering “the horror...the horror,” we must imagine the scene projected from his mind’s eye upon the screen of his fading consciousness. Again, we are in the presence of an absence inspiring horror.⁹⁹

The incommunicability of horror is perfectly dramatized in Pascal Laugier’s 2008 French horror film *Martyrs*. Near the mid-point of the film, a young woman named Anna (Morjana Alaoui) is alone in a suburban house after her friend Lucie (Mylène Jampanoï) has gone on a murderous rampage killing an entire family. Soon after the murders, Anna is forced to kill Lucie who is seemingly possessed by a supernatural entity, though from Anna’s perspective Lucie’s madness seems to be purely a violent psychological event. As Anna considers her next move several strangers dressed in black overalls enter the house and take her hostage in a secret passageway beneath the home leading to a sophisticated dungeon constructed solely for the purposes of torture. Confused and frightened by this turn of events, an older woman known only as Mademoiselle (Catherine Bégin) sits Anna down and cryptically explains that people no longer suffer as they once did. Mademoiselle begins showing Anna a series of photographs from early to mid-twentieth century of young women in various states of distress, all of whom were photographed as close to death as possible with their eyes wide open, gazing blankly upward – just as Kurtz had before he died. As Mademoiselle flips through her packet of photographs she commands Anna to “look at the eyes!” Finally, Mademoiselle tells Anna that in cases when a woman who suffers a great deal turns herself over to the suffering completely, she is able to become transfigured into a martyr.

What follows for the remainder of the film is the psychic reconfiguration of Anna by way of her total physical destruction at the hands of a hulking male torturer. After it seems Anna has relented to her physical annihilation when it becomes clear she is no longer interested in struggling out of her captivity, her torturer takes the final step in her transfiguration and surgically flays all of the skin from her body save her face. Anna is said to have become unresponsive for a period of time, but after regaining responsiveness Mademoiselle visits Anna in a special containment room to find that her eyes have turned upward and have gone blank as the eyes of the women who were martyred in her

photographs. Mademoiselle approaches Anna and asks her to verbally relay what she witnessed during her period of “transcendence,” and Anna begins whispering in Mademoiselle’s ear, conveying her secret. Anna is the first martyred girl since this operation began decades ago to report on what she saw and experienced during her time of unresponsiveness (or martyrdom). At the film’s conclusion dozens of wealthy benefactors arrive at the house where Anna is being kept to hear Mademoiselle’s report on the martyred Anna’s testimony, but before she is scheduled to relay what she has learned, Mademoiselle kills herself.

In her seminal book *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, Elaine Scarry points out that it is not accidental that the rooms in which tortures are staged around the world take the names of sites that suggest the production of fictions. “In the torturer’s idiom the room in which the brutality occurs was called the ‘production room’ in the Philippines, the ‘cinema room’ in South Vietnam, the blue-lit stage in Chile.”¹⁰⁰ By assigning these spaces of incomprehensible violence a fictional designation the torturer and those who stand witness to his barbarism are granted – as the cinema grants – a degree of detachment from the facticity of his actions.¹⁰¹ But what is most striking about *Martyrs* is the way in which it stages the relationship between language and horror in the context of Kurtz’s insistence that it is impossible for words to describe horror. Scarry insists that, “physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned.”¹⁰² The film’s ending makes clear that there is a paradox at play: the pain inflicted upon Anna seeks not the destruction of language, but rather its evocation in order to bestow visibility on the enormity of horror’s interiority, nested in the hidden and incommunicable.

I am reminded here of Harun Farouki’s short experimental film *The Inextinguishable Fire* (1969) in which he states that the image of Iranian women whose faces are de-veiled and photographed depicts “the horror of being photographed for the first time.” In *Martyrs*, inversely, the face signaling transubstantiation results in the horror of being photographed for the last time, and caught within the vacant gazes of the martyred women is an encounter with horror that is forever foreclosed to us, but whose absence we cannot help but feel.

Horror and the Face-to-Face Encounter

James Elkins, in his 1994 meditation on relationality in the experience of aesthetic objects titled *The Object Stares Back*, emphasizes a crucial dimension of artistic experience in which objects grounded in the visible world for whatever reason go “unseen.” In a chapter titled “Looking Away, and Seeing Too Much,” Elkins examines one of the most characteristic, but often ignored aspects of vision – those things that are available to our visual field but go unregistered in consciousness. Elkins pursues his inquiries through George Bataille who famously asserted “...there are three things that cannot be seen, even though they may be right in front of our eyes: the sun, genitals and death.” Elkins notes Bataille’s observations are provocative for the first two ‘unseeables’ are things we certainly encounter innumerable times in our lives, but the third thing is fundamentally less prevalent. Elkins asks, “I wonder what it could possibly mean to see

death.” He notes that throughout the history of art, death is most often inscribed as a metaphor in objects like hourglasses, skulls, decaying fruit and mirrors. For Elkins these objects, paradoxically, do not accomplish what their deployment in artworks strive toward – making death visible. Instead, Elkins reads these objects and how they metaphorize death as a way of “not thinking about death” – *by consigning death to the ersatz object of the metaphor and making it invisible.*

Elkins looks to the medium of photography using two series of photographs of Chinese executions from the book *Violence in Our Times* – photographs that look strikingly similar to the photos Mademoiselle shows Anna – to interrogate Bataille’s claim that death is unseeable. In one series there are two photographs of a public beheading. The first photograph was taken half a second after the beheading, “the blood is still on its way up into the air and the hair on the man’s head is still blown back by the fall.” In the second photograph the image “is from a moment nearer to the beheading. The sword is still on its downward arc, and it moves only an inch below the falling head. Death is much closer here. The head itself is a black smudge, giving me an uncanny feeling: death must be right here, within seconds or inches of this place. Even the shadows have not had time to record the death: in his shadow, the man’s head is still on his shoulders.”¹⁰³ Elkins concludes, “...Bataille may be right and death can never be seen. It is most horrifying when it seems inescapably close, closer than a man to his shadow.” If death belongs to the realm of the unseeable for Bataille and Elkins supports Bataille’s position with his reading of the execution photographs, how should we be expected to experience “horror” films? Might it also be true of the deaths in horror films that they cannot be seen? Are the deaths of the teenagers in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* or the deaths in *Psycho* unseeable in the same way that the death of the beheaded man is for Elkins? I would argue that these films are capable of inspiring the feeling of horror, but the feeling is not localized at the site of death; like refracted light, horror strikes consciousness as a series of displacements from unexpected angles. Elkins describes this phenomenon through his encounter with the second series of Chinese execution photographs from *Violence in Our Times* in which four photographs depict an adulteress who is bound to a stake and dissected:

This is one of the most powerful sequences of images I know in any genre and from any period, and the reason, I think, comes from the way they hold the idea of death. In virtually every other instance, death is something that happens just after or moments before the image. In real life, if I watch someone die, I see them before, and then I know afterward that they have died. In pictures of warfare, the dead lie in ditches and in heaps, and in front-line footage, a person may be alive in one frame and then instantly dead the next. But here I know that death must be in the sequence, trapped between the frames. I may not know exactly where it is (it could be between the second and the third picture, or the third and the fourth), but I know it happens before my eyes and that it happens over and over again as I look at the sequence...the way death is trapped

here, both in the sequence and somehow between the frames is permanently unsettling.¹⁰⁴

Here Elkins' aligns the exteriority of terror with *space* and the interiority of horror with *time*. He experiences the photograph as a space of negation and describes confronting death before him as a conceptual leap between two places: a before moment and an after moment. But in the series of execution photographs he describes death as having no discernable location and reports that he knows death happens over and over again before his eyes, but concludes that death must be trapped between the frames, a moment of "unseeability" guarded by the temporality of the sequence that produces a feeling that is "permanently unsettling." This experience for Elkins is one of degree and not of kind. Photographs of warfare and the countless images of death they depict localize death by pinning it to a permanent moment. But the photographs of the adulteress' execution, for Elkins, resists localization and speaks death from the interstices of the sequence. In both cases we are dealing with photographs and, in the second case, photographs of death, but one set of photographs binds death to a permanent space, whereas the other set of photographs resist spacialization and becomes a kind of permeable force that does not depict death visually or spatially, producing an affective experience of death that seemingly echoes from no discernable location. It is by the very fact of its non-localizability that the photographs become "permanently unsettling" for Elkins and within these experiential coordinates horror emerges.

Returning to Kracauer's metaphor, if Athena's polished shield in the hands of Perseus offers the reflection of the thing we do not and cannot see, is the actual horror transmuted into something visible to consciousness and psychically manageable? Or is Athena's shield itself the site of horror as it is immersed in the horrors it makes visible? Elkins has pointed out that images of violence and death can contain the temporality of human oblivion in a way that produces an experience of horror that would otherwise be foreclosed to us in the actual moment the image captures. The photograph opens the event to the kind of reflection necessary for one to experience horror – or as van Doren Stern suggests, horror is rooted in the imagination. It is the photograph itself that becomes the site of horror. The logic is clear: if a medium renders the unseeable seeable, then whatever phenomenal effect the previously unseeable object produces becomes constitutive of the medium itself. Thus, it is Athena's shield that is the site of the actual horror of the Gorgon Medusa, and the face-to-face encounter with the Gorgon is something that forever remains outside the parameters of understanding. If in Kracauer's estimation "the film is Athena's polished shield," then it follows that the film inspires a feeling of horror foreclosed to us in actuality, only made visible in the re/presentation the film's "reflection" makes possible. These insights recall the rewinding and slow motion replay of the hog being killed in the opening sequence of *Benny's Video*.¹⁰⁵

Also implicit in Kracauer's point is that actual horrors cannot be *immediately* experienced as they require mediation. When Perseus looks into Athena's shield, not only is the image of the Gorgon Medusa given to him in a representational field reproducing, like a photograph, the actual space of the experience. The shield also takes the horror of the Gorgon Medusa's gaze out of time proper to herself and consigns her to the space and time of reproduction and reflection. Thus, horror is consigned to the temporality of reflection. To look directly at the Gorgon Medusa and meet death in her gaze is to be terrified, but to look upon the Gorgon Medusa in Athena's shield – an image of herself

outside of herself; outside of her own time and the event of intersubjective annihilation that her gaze should signify – what is, then, annihilation forestalled – is to be horrified.

20th Century Violence and 21st Century “Horrorism”: The Concept of Horror in Continental Aesthetics

The advent of global warfare and an increasing focus on notions of subjectivity throughout the twentieth century in Western thought opened fertile ground for exploring the phenomenology of violence. Several years after WWI had concluded, Ernst Junger’s *Storm of Steel* celebrated trench warfare as the “authentic intersubjective encounter” wherein the reciprocal offering of death between individuals marked an irreducibly primal form of relationality.¹⁰⁶ For Junger, the horrific dimension of the intersubjective encounter in warfare resided in the necessity of exterminating the other in a face-to-face encounter. Writing on the Nazi extermination camps of WWII, Giorgio Agamben also indicates that the forms of violence twentieth century warfare had unleashed on the human psyche opened up a new and horrifying form of relationality. Writing on the Holocaust, Agamben insists, “a limit... was reached, as if something like a new ethical material were touched upon in the living being.”¹⁰⁷ Following Agamben, Adriana Cavarero notes that this new ethical material “has to do with the experience of a subject who has become a witness to its own oblivion as a subject.”¹⁰⁸ In the course of two world wars and the countless other conflicts such as the Vietnam War, human conflict had achieved a level of incomprehensibility in the forms of violence it proved, against reason (and paradoxically as a result of it), capable of enacting. What naturally followed was a reconsideration of the relationship between the self and the other by conceiving of the *self as other*; a reminder that at the root of subjectivity lies the fact that what is possible for the other must also be possible for the self.

Hannah Arendt has noted that western philosophy up to and through the twentieth century has avoided addressing human plurality in favor of abstract figures like the “subject”, and “Man.”¹⁰⁹ Arendt seems to suggest what is ultimately at stake in twentieth century warfare concerns how extreme violence reveals forgotten facets of human relationality that are fundamental to the human condition; facets that were discarded in the overemphasis on the individual and modern philosophy’s narcissistic focus on subjectivity. Judith Butler agrees with Arendt’s point and advances her own position on this matter when she writes, “The individual that shores itself up, seeks to reconstitute its imagined wholeness, but only at the price of denying its own vulnerability and affliction or some recognition of the possibility that the other may be wounded.”¹¹⁰ Cavarero emphasizes Butler’s remarks when reiterating Butler’s suggestion that, “The “I” is not closed, but rather open and exposed: what is prematurely, or belatedly, called the ‘I’ is, at the outset, enthralled, even if it is to a violence, an abandonment.”¹¹¹ Butler’s use of the verb “enthrall” is crucial here for in the opening of the “I” to the other, the fascination of the “I” in all that the other entails seizes the “I’s” attention in two significant ways: The encounter of the “I” with the other exposes the “I” to the radical contingency of multiplicity (others). Secondly, in the other, the “I” is able to discern things regarding its own nature. More importantly though, where the ontology of horror is concerned, Butler recognizes that at the outset the “I” is already enthralled in its exposure to the world of others (as Junger and Agamben suggest) and violence is but one possibility for a type of

enthraling. In other words, violence is not the kernel of fascination for the “I” in its premature or belated formation, it is merely a condition of possibility (and *ipso facto* a condition of possibility for horror).

The twentieth century’s great “horrorist” Georges Bataille also acknowledged the “open and exposed” nature of being-in-the-world, but insisted that violence and death were the constitutive features of the intersubjective arrangement. Cavarero points out that, “Bataille was driven to think a subjectivity that is no longer shut up in the arrogance of the self-sufficient individual of modernity but rather open, passively exposed to the other and disposed to encounter it in a reciprocal exposure that has its essential cipher in the sharing out of death.”¹¹² Although Bataille’s cosmology was entirely predicated on the interdependence of individuals and their exposure to one another, he could not help but reduce their relationality to the most violent expressions. In Cavarero’s estimation, “Bataille’s tastes bring the profound nucleus of horror fully to light.”

“There is, it seems, a face-to-face aspect to horror that cannot be avoided,” writes Cavarero who locates the primal scene of horror in Greek mythology and the encounter with the visage of the Gorgon Medusa. Cavarero perspicaciously notes that “when you gaze on the face of the Gorgon, it is she who makes of you the mirror in which, transforming you into stone, she regards her terrible face and recognizes herself in her double.”¹¹³ In this rich description of the encounter with the Gorgon Medusa one begins to approach the ontological coordinates of horror. The face-to-face encounter with Medusa should not be read unilaterally from the position of the subject who is threatened with petrification in meeting her gaze. This encounter must be read reciprocally for not only does one risk annihilation in the gaze of the Gorgon Medusa, but she is also made subject to a radical form of negation, for in the petrification of the other she is made to recognize her own being in the other’s annihilation. Thus, what the Gorgon Medusa is left with in every encounter is her own annihilation caught within the annihilation of the other.

It becomes clear what the face-to-face encounter makes possible: “It is a question of the killing of uniqueness as primary ontological crime”¹¹⁴ If a particular type of intersubjective horror is encapsulated in the destruction of human uniqueness, what does the very acknowledgement of the other, the fact of having to exist with others in the world and in whom the possibility of horror completely and irreducibly resides, mean for the subject? Ultimately, violence in the twentieth century made evident a process of radical intensification in which the means used to pursue a given set of ends became increasingly untenable.

The One, The Other, and Their Encounter

Julia Kristeva opens her remarkable work on horror, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, by insisting that within abjection looms a violent and dark revolt of being. Kristeva believes that this dark revolt is “directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable.” As she puts it, “It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated... Unflaggingly, like an inescapable boomerang, a vortex of summons and repulsion places the one haunted by it literally beside himself.”¹¹⁵ These evocative insights not only touch upon the nature of horror in a profound way, they also seem to

unveil a kind of secret ontological contest between the individual and his shadow. These remarks bear a striking resemblance to the scene at the end of the “Lordship and Bondage” chapter in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of the Spirit* in which presence is registered through negation when one is confronted by the finitude of an “other” who stands in for the self. This confrontation is not expressed as, “there I am as well, multiplied,” but rather, “If I am over there, then I must not be here.” In this shadow of doubt where, paradoxically, the absence of one’s self is signified by the presence of one’s self outside of one’s self, the telescoping of self-absence and self-presence into one another, and most importantly, *conceiving* of this intersubjective collapse of being and non-being into an intrasubjective loss of uniqueness is an originary moment in which horror is inspired through relationality. The horror of the Gorgon Medusa’s recognition of herself through the negation her petrifying gaze enacts upon the other exhibits conditional similarities to the Bondsman’s predicament surrounding his relation to his labor. But how, precisely, are Kristeva’s remarks on horror’s essence and Hegel’s drama between the Lord and the Bondsman similar, and what does this comparison reveal about the nature of horror through the lens of phenomenology?

At the end of Hegel’s Lordship and Bondage chapter, the life-and-death struggle that had characterized the mutual recognition of two beings at the outset of their encounter returns after a series of complex phenomenological transactions. The Bondsman’s consciousness now works to allay a confrontation with the experience Hegel calls “absolute fear;” an experience produced in the recognition of himself in his own negation. This recognition of the self through negation is the result of the Bondsman’s contract with the Lord for whom he labors upon things by proxy. In this labor the Bondsman achieves a sense of self-recognition as the object indexes his activity through the traces left behind upon it. But the object is neither his to possess nor his to disseminate, for the object is the property of the Lord. Thus, the Bondsman’s recognition of himself in the object of his labor, an object he is both radically detached from at the level of ownership and detached from in its making (for the Bondsman’s contract to the Lord stipulates that he labor on the latter’s behalf) produces a sense of “absolute fear” in the vertiginous experience of both recognizing himself in the thing and of having his selfhood negated in his fundamental detachment from the thing upon which he labors.

It is worth noting the correlation here between the Bondsman’s predicament at the conclusion of the Lordship and Bondage chapter and the encounter with the Gorgon Medusa described by Cavarero. Just as the Gorgon Medusa comes to recognize itself through the act of petrifying and making into a mirror (in death) the other upon whom she casts her gaze, and just as the Gorgon experiences a sense of negation in this doubling of her self in the annihilation of the other, so too does the Bondsman experience a threat to his autonomy in his working upon a thing that circulates through channels from which he is radically detached. The Gorgon Medusa and the Bondsman are both participants in a mode of relationality through the creation of things that will invariably survive them. This is the “primary ontological crime” of “the killing of uniqueness” that Cavarero rightly insists is a powerful expression of horror.

Hegel uses the term “absolute fear” to refer to the sense of radical detachment experienced by the Bondsman who is left to confront his erasure (death) in the loss of objects that bare the traces of his being. These are objects that had doubled as the formative site of his self-awareness. Might we not read Kristeva’s rumination on horror

as another way of describing Hegel's sense of "absolute fear"? Kristeva tells us that looming within abjection is a violent and dark revolt of being against a threat emanating from an "exorbitant outside or inside." As the Bondsman is alerted to his finitude in his detachment from the thing that bares the traces of his selfhood, he comes to recognize the very status of his being as threatened. The Bondsman is left little choice but to mount a "violent and dark revolt" from the very core of his being in an effort to shore up this newly exposed vulnerability. Thus, annihilation is no longer locatable in the other *per se*, but, radically, becomes a condition of determinate, embodied consciousness. As the fear of death is removed from the context of life as a consequence of confronting the other and returns as a condition of embodied consciousness, it loses its distinctive *spatial* aspect and, in turn, becomes a *temporal* problem. This distinction, as we will see, just as it was for scholars of the gothic novel, is critical in differentiating experiences of horror from experiences of (absolute) fear and/or terror.

Hegel describes the state of this consciousness as "...fearful, not of this or that particular thing or just at odd moments, but its whole being has been seized with dread; for it has experienced the fear of death as the absolute lord...in that experience it has been quite unmanned, has trembled in every fiber of its being, and everything solid and stable has been shaken to its foundations. But this pure universal movement, the absolute melting away of everything stable, is the simple, essential nature of self-consciousness, absolute negativity, *pure being-for-self*, which consequently is implicit in this consciousness."¹¹⁶ Judith Butler appears to be directly in dialogue with this passage when she writes, "The bondsman verges on this shattering recognition of his own death (what Kristeva might have called "exorbitant, beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable")...but he recoils from recognizing death, attaching himself instead to various attributes of his own...clinging to what appears to be firm about himself, firmly clinging to himself, in order not to know that death threatens every aspect of his own firmness..."¹¹⁷

What the Bondsman verges on in the "shattering recognition of his own death" is an untethered plunge into horror; what would, in some sense, amount to directly meeting the gaze of the Gorgon Medusa. Just as Kristeva insists that abjection secretes its own counteraction, a "dark revolt of being" that refuses to assimilate the siren-call of dread that threatens it – that beseeches and fascinates *desire* without succumbing to its seduction – so too does the Bondsman "recoil from recognizing death." And just as Kristeva insists that being combats abjection by means of some "certainty of which it is proud," Butler claims that the Bondsman forestalls the full recognition of his death by clinging to "what appears to be firm" about himself.¹¹⁸ What all of these dramas – that of the Lord and the Bondsman, that of the Gorgon Medusa, that of Bataille's "open and exposed nature" of the human condition that Arendt, Kristeva, and Cavarero each touch upon – makes clear is that at the heart of relationality and the intersubjective encounter the specter of horror looms large.

The Bondsman's predicament at the conclusion of "Lordship and Bondage," and the circumstances under which this figure comes to recognize both his selfhood and his vulnerability in the external world exhibit fundamental commonalities with the gaze of the Gorgon Medusa. If the image and myth of the Gorgon Medusa, as Cavarero identifies, represents one of the earliest conceptions of an experience of horror, it follows that Hegel's account of the acquisition of self-consciousness has deeply metaphysical

implications concerning the experience of horror.¹¹⁹ In spite of Hegel's use of terms like "absolute fear" and "terror," it is evident that the experiential register we are in is neither fear nor terror, but rather, horror. The fact that Kristeva's opening paragraph in her essay on horror could be used with almost no augmentation to describe the Bondsman's predicament in confronting his own finitude, in some respects, attests to this. The true threat to the Bondsman is the possibility of, as Cavarero phrases it, "the killing of uniqueness as primary ontological crime." This is a definitive metaphysical condition of horror and, again, the Bondsman and the Gorgon are both victims of this crime, though the crime scene for each is different.

What we also learn is that the reconfiguration of the life-and-death struggle from the beginning of "Lordship and Bondage" through to its conclusion depicts an evolution of the nature of the threat of death to the Bondsman. What starts out as localizable and bound, spatially, to the proximity and site of the other becomes diffused, non-localizable and irreducibly bound to consciousness itself. Terror (and its correlate 'fear') is necessarily a condition of space, it is reflexive and expresses an immediate shock or imminent danger, and to this extent terror is an external, primal response. Conversely, horror is a condition of time and does not (nor could it ever) refer to an immediate spatial predicament. Horror finds its truest expression in the realm of the imaginary where the mind wrestles to conceive the inconceivable; it requires self-consciousness (or supersensibility).

Notwithstanding the steps taken here toward illustrating the profound confusion surrounding the term horror, its pervasive misuse and even more pervasive misunderstanding, this brief phenomenology of horror remains provisional. Nevertheless, it is evident that horror is worth considering beyond the ontological range of violence and death that has circumscribed an understanding of horror over the past two hundred years. I am compelled to believe that further remediation of our understanding of horror, an understanding that seeks to discard the detritus accumulated over the past two centuries in the muddy currents of popular culture, may reveal horror to be a fundamental actor at the heart of the human condition.

II: Absence and Horror in the Shadows of Nuclear Light: Georges Bataille as a reader of *Hiroshima Mon Amour*

Recalling James Elkins' succinct rephrasing of Georges Bataille's assertion from *The Solar Anus*: "there are three things that cannot be seen...that throw the eyes into so much confusion, even though they may be right in front of our eyes: the sun, genitals, and death."¹²⁰ Elkins uses Bataille's formulation to suggest there are times when an irreparable break occurs between experience and language that can only be overcome by altering the nature of the very object that has produced the break. As Elkins puts it, there are occasions "when deformation is so strong that an object becomes incomprehensible, it is necessary to describe it by renaming it."¹²¹ Again, the problem here, as Kurtz intimated to Willard, is how does one communicate the incommunicable? Furthermore, under what conditions are objects deformed that they become incomprehensible and must be renamed in their description? Another question one might ask is, by what means should

this renaming take place and is it possible that the renaming of an object might occur by means other than language?

To offer a response to the first question we might turn to one of Bataille's most famous short stories, *Story of the Eye* – a brief tale of an extremely violent and extraordinarily obscene relationship between a young boy and girl that grows increasingly disturbing when they both became obsessed with an even younger girl by the name of Marcelle. The story is narrated from the perspective of the boy who chronicles in vivid detail the sordid nature of his sexual encounters with his lover, Simone, and others. The sexual relationship between the boy-narrator and Simone is described as especially sublime in moments when their bodies discharge vomit, blood, urine or semen in any and all combinations. A typical encounter between the boy-narrator and Simone involves one or both of them urinating on each other just prior to, or even more unthinkably, during orgasm. Marcelle, the young girl they have grown fond of and the object of both of their desires, is far more timid than the boy-narrator and Simone. One evening during a spontaneous orgy prompted by the boy-narrator and Simone, Marcelle has a traumatic sexual episode that ends with Marcelle locked in an antique wardrobe so flushed with libidinal energy she climaxes and urinates almost simultaneously. Once released from the antique wardrobe, Marcelle is described as “staggering wildly across the room with shrieks and snarls” and collapsing in a jeremiad of inhuman howls.

The fourth chapter of Bataille's story, titled “Sunspot,” describes the boy-narrator and Simone's pursuit of Marcelle after she has been admitted to a sanatorium for mental illness following the sexual experience in the antique wardrobe that left her urinating and howling uncontrollably. Caught in the throes of a tempest outside the sanatorium, the boy-narrator and Simone see Marcelle at her bedroom window tying a bed sheet to one of the bars. They immediately begin producing erotic fantasies around the possibility of Marcelle's suicide, but when they realize that it is not Marcelle's intention to kill her self it subsequently becomes clear that the sheet is being hung to dry in an attempt to remove a large wet spot in the fabric. What then becomes evident is the wet spot on the sheet was caused by Marcelle urinating on her bed, which, at this point in the story, has come to connote Marcelle's sexuality, and more precisely, sexuality in general.

When the boy-narrator and Simone return home after traveling through the relentless storm, Simone becomes quite ill and remains bedridden for several weeks. During the period of her convalescence the boy-narrator recognizes that Simone has increasingly elevated the memory of Marcelle's urine stained sheets to the status of a fetish object. In pursuit of some epistemological locus of Simone's sexuality, the boy-narrator recalls interrogating Marcelle on her fascination with urine and offers the following reflection: *Upon my asking what the word urinate reminded her of she replied, “terminate, the eyes, with a razor, something red, the sun.”* In this obscure response one thing is immediately, if only retroactively, made evident.

The title of chapter four – *Sunspot* – acquires its ground in Simone's reply to the boy-narrator's inquiry, for the logic is simple: if the word “urinate” evokes for her the image of the sun then it follows that Marcelle's urine stained bed sheet would have to be conceived as a *sunspot*. Simone's reply is also crucial in the semiotic economy of the story as episodes of lewd sexuality, death, urination and the sun become more tightly braided. In fact, as an object in-itself and, doubly, as a node in the story's signifying chain of death, sex and urine, the sun becomes the dominant image and metaphor in the

story. As such, it is worth noting the story's final sexual episode. The boy-narrator, Simone, and a man they have befriended by the name Sir Edmund kidnap and murder a priest whom Simone rapes as he is being strangled, and who is said to have ejaculated precisely at the moment of his death. At the conclusion of this horrific episode, Simone is described as having squatted over the corpse of the priest whose eyelids remained open, one eye having already been cut out by scissors, and urinating into the dead man's eye socket. Bataille's assertion concerning the sun, coitus and cadavers from *The Solar Anus* and Elkins' simplification of the formula into "eyes are thrown into confusion via the sun, genitals and death" could aptly serve as an effective tagline for the events in *Story of the Eye*. In a rather intricate web of significations and transformations Marcelle's urine stained sheet cannot be thought of in-itself as *a sheet that has been stained with urine*, rather, for Simone, it only gains the ground of meaning as urine is metaphorized into objects and images that have no correlation whatsoever with the substance of urine itself.

In this transformation, though Simone never identifies it as such, the urine stain on Marcelle's sheet becomes a *sunspot*, something that is beyond the capacity of the physical eye to see. Part of the necessity of this transformation is evidently linked to the powerful association between urine and orgasmic energy in the story. When asked what comes to mind when she thinks of the word "urinate," Simone's obscure response to her lover gains clarity. It is not merely the expulsion of urine from a desired partner left visible on a surface (a kind of screen, if you will) that short-circuits her vision, but rather, the highly cathected status of urine in the story to the level of semen, if not higher, that causes her to free associate the sight of urine as something that cannot be seen in-itself, namely, the sun. Here deformation of the object (a urine stained sheet) occurs through an extreme libidinal investment on the part of Simone in the expulsion of urine at the moment of orgasmic release, such that she becomes incapable of recognizing the substance purely for what it is.

Through the process of this particular transformation an intriguing paradox emerges. Not only is the urine/Sun binary described as deforming, obscuring or impairing vision, but in the story's most horrific episode, urine is expelled directly into the eyes of the priest's corpse. As if it were not enough that death had robbed the priest of his faculty of vision, urine in the eyes, as a metaphor for the Sun and a sign of sexuality, announces the state of blindness in death all the more forcefully. The paradox lies in the correlation of urine (sexuality) and the deformation of vision into the master signifier of illumination: the Sun. Ordinarily, one might conceive sunlight as something that permits vision by illuminating objects and revealing the visible world. But in Bataille's formulation, and Elkins after him, looking at the sun is blinding. Sunlight obscures vision in such a way that sometimes all one can make out are shimmering outlines that can only be rendered legible by some name or means outside of language entirely.

It is significant to note the other terms used by Simone in her free association of the word "urinate" (terminate, the eyes, with a razor...) are quite literally evoked in Luis Bunuel's seminal surrealist film *Un Chien Andalou*, shot in 1929, one year after the publication of Bataille's *Story of the Eye*. Though well known it stands repeating that Bunuel's film begins with a series of shots, one of which is a man (played by the filmmaker) slicing open a woman's eye with a straight razor. The influence of Bataille on Bunuel's film is unmistakable, but beyond merely staging the image from Bataille's story, what Bunuel's film offers, however indirect such a reading may be, is an attempt to

rename the deformed imagination of Simone through means other than language. Most intriguingly, not only means other than language, but by purely visual means through the cinematic apparatus. Thus, Bunuel offers another turn of the paradox concerning visibility and invisibility in the *Story of the Eye*, and more importantly proposes a means of renaming outside of language, for he employs the visual machinery of the cinema to render Simone's psychic deformation of objects and the linguistic transformations they succeedingly undergo. Thirty years after the publication of Bataille's influential story and Bunuel's equally influential, if implicit, depiction of Simone's "visual impairment" through cinematic means, Alain Resnais' reflection on the bombing of Hiroshima in *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959) brings together Bataille's triptych of the sun, genitals and death in astonishing ways.

The bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki represent the only instances in human history of nuclear weapons used in warfare. The bomb dropped on Hiroshima alone vaporized 200,000 thousand civilians instantly and more than 80,000 others were wounded or died later from the radiation fall out. Based on such atrocity one would not immediately expect a film to associate any notion of "love" with Hiroshima.¹²² But Resnais' film, before a single black and white frame has been projected, cues participants through its title to anticipate some imaginary conjunction of light, eroticism and horror.

Werner Herzog has often said that the sun, though iconic as a pleasant image, is really nothing more than one million nuclear bombs exploding every second.¹²³ Apropos of Resnais' film, and in relation to Bataille's conception of the sun, Herzog's point is well taken. Manifestations of light in *Hiroshima Mon Amour* and the kinds of vision it produces and/or annihilates are inextricably bound to the flash of light, the *sunspot*, of a nuclear explosion. To illustrate some of the ways in which a Bataillian logic can be read as structuring signs and meaning in *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, a close examination of the film's opening sequence proves instructive.

The first diegetic image of *Hiroshima Mon Amour* fades in on a nude couple locked in a lugubrious embrace framed in a medium close-up that contains only the torsos and shifting arms of the couple. The identity of the couple is obscured as their faces remain out of frame. Also obscured in this opening image is the race and gender of the figures as the surface of their skin appears to be covered in an ashen substance drifting into the frame from above like snowfall. The image is dimly spotlit from an out of frame source originating from the right-hand side of the frame that makes only the arms of the figures visible while the rest of the body is cast in darkness. A quick dissolve into the following image reveals the same figures embraced, but the ashen texture of their flesh appears to be moistened as it now glistens in the circumscribed light which, noticeably, has shifted from an out of frame source from the right of the frame to direct lighting from the position of the camera.

In a second dissolve into a third variation of the same shot the moistened coat of ash on the torsos of the couple has been completely removed and the flesh of the couple appears warmly lit and devoid of all moisture; moreover, the position of the embrace itself seems to have been inverted in some way. In this third shot of the opening embrace the bodies of the couple are now lit from an out of frame source originating from the top of the frame. After a final dissolve into a fourth image of this couple's embrace, the camera now faces the man's back as we see the hands of his partner, a woman, clenching his shoulder blades. Their identities still obscured, a man's voice emerges on the

soundtrack and says, “*You saw nothing in Hiroshima. Nothing.*” To which a woman’s voice replies, “*I saw everything. Everything.*”

Presumably these voices belong to the couple locked in the embrace though this remains uncertain at this point. This conversational pattern of assertion/negation will continue for the duration of the sequence. The woman’s voice goes on to assert, “*I saw the hospital in Hiroshima, I’m sure of it. The hospital in Hiroshima exists. How could I not have seen it?*” While we hear this narration the camera tracks down the hallway of a hospital corridor where we can see patients standing in doorways. Several subsequent cuts show more patients in beds, well dressed in kimonos holding hand fans. After the camera tracks into one of the hospital rooms one of the patients lying in bed looks directly into the camera momentarily before turning her head away from the camera’s gaze. Not insignificantly, in three quick, successive shots we see other patients turning their eyes away from the camera. In the following cut we are returned to the tracking shot of the hallway, but this time we hear the voice of the man say, “*You didn’t see the hospital in Hiroshima. You saw nothing in Hiroshima.*” Conspicuously, in this version of the tracking shot there are no patients in the doorways and the hallway is completely empty.

This conflict of recollection and vision between the man and woman is irresolvable at the level of language. The film immediately calls vision and recollection into question. But, most remarkably, where the woman narrator asserts she remembers images of Hiroshima and the male narrator rejoins that she could not possibly recall the images she describes, the cinematic apparatus itself offers the images whose recollection is being contested. The camera, as it tracks through the hallway and rooms of the hospital, offers a kind of vision outside of vision, a memory, impossibly, disconnected from all verifiable experience. It appears that the camera democratically produces both the male narrator’s position that the woman saw nothing at Hiroshima, while simultaneously offering the female narrator’s “memory” as well. Though obvious, it is worth stressing that these images remain unavailable to the couple in a reciprocal manner and are only available to the eyes of the participant. These opening lines of narration set the tone of the film’s opening sequence and introduces several crucial thematic binaries: visible/invisible, memory/forgetting, and language/image.

Another crucial theme introduced in the opening images has to do with relationality. Although the images appear to offer merely a tight shot of an embrace, its symbolic implications run much deeper. What seems to be a dim, yet warmly lit intersubjective embrace, an erotic embrace that utterly occludes the outside world, might in fact be read as a poetic moment of intimacy in the immediate aftermath of the nuclear blast. The couple grip each other tightly, illuminated by one source of distant light. The source of the light is never revealed, only suggested, as ash appears to cover them completely. It is a well-known fact that at the periphery of the blast zone in Hiroshima clouds of ash from the victims cremated in nuclear light fell on the people and spaces that narrowly escaped destruction.¹²⁴ Keeping historical facts in play, it is possible to read the opening images of *Hiroshima Mon Amour* as not simply the image of an intersubjective embrace, but rather as the site of *multiplicitous relationality* between the figural and the non-figural, between the living and the dead. In other words, what the nuclear blast produced was not simply the total annihilation of tens of thousands of people and the subsequent deaths of many more in the fallout, but the obliteration of singularity and the

horror that comes with the erasure of identity and the destruction of uniqueness by reducing people to ash and making their remains indistinguishable in the dust storms of death that immediately followed the bombing. Thus, the eroticized bodies locked in a sexual embrace are made into canvases upon which the drifting ash of the supernumerary dead come to rest and in a most astonishing way (not the least of which is how the couple is made to feel the absence of the dead in the drifting ash), through particular transformations of modes of expression only the cinema permits, the eyes of the participant remain incapable of seeing the very things Bataille insisted our eyes could not see: sun (as undefined source of light), genitals (the sight of sex occluded from the frame of the images) and death (the annihilation of life coded as post-nuclear ashen remains). Resnais manages to represent the unrepresentable – and communicate the incommunicable – by refiguring the psychic deformation of the bombing into new images.

After the images of the hospital and the exchanges of assertion and negation between the male and female narrators, the female narrator insists that she has been to a museum in Hiroshima. As the camera tracks from left to right through a memorial of objects and photographs from the bombing the female narrator recollects that she, “walked among other people looking at photographs, reconstructions, for lack of anything else.” She goes on to describe how she, “looked upon the scorched, twisted metal, metal made as vulnerable as flesh... flesh still suspended, its agony still fresh, charred stones... and anonymous masses of hair.” As she vocalizes her recollection the cinematic apparatus offers us images from inside a museum of the very objects she describes, though it remains uncertain whether or not the images we are seeing are in fact the products of her memory. But in this division between her verbal recollection and the images that accompany her descriptions what becomes apparent is that it is not certain she is actually recollecting images from memory, but that she *needs* to recollect these images.

This point can be made more clear by returning briefly to a scene from *Story of the Eye*. After attending an especially gruesome bullfight,¹²⁵ Simone and company are said to be traveling on a boat by sea. At some point during the journey Simone loses some photographs of the bullfight, what she describes as, “Objects from a solar blaze lost at sea.” Mourning their loss she muses over their importance to a male companion who dismisses them. Simone insists, “But I need them to fix that event to the earthy soil, to a geographic point and precise date, an event that my imagination compulsively pictures as a simple vision of solar deliquescence.” To my mind, there is not a more apt description of what the female narrator from *Hiroshima Mon Amour* struggles to express through the objects she insists she can recollect. All of the photographs she describes, the twisted, scorched objects; the melted bicycles and bottle caps; the scorched stones, all of which bear the indexical traces of the nuclear flash, objects themselves victim to a kind of “solar deliquescence;” all of these objects memorialized in a museum are there for her to anchor an event that would otherwise be left adrift in her imagination. These objects function as temporal and spatial markers, which in their purely objective status, devoid of the corrosive energies the mind produces to protect itself through forgetting, are able to “fix the event to the earthy soil.” It is worth recalling here that after Kurtz described the horror of seeing the children with their arms chopped off that he says to Willard, “And I want to remember it... I never want to forget. I never want to forget.”

But even her verbal recollections are called into question later in the film's opening sequence when she explains to her companion, "I was hot in peace square. 10,000 degrees in peace square. I know it. The temperature of the sun in peace square." To which the male narrator simply responds as the scene cuts back to the erotic embrace, "You saw nothing in Hiroshima. Nothing." For the first time the woman's recollections are of an impossible event for she literally could not recollect that moment from experience anymore than she could walk across the surface of the sun. But it seems that this form of misremembering is precisely the type of deformation of vision Elkins suggests through Bataille. When something cannot be seen for what it is (sun, genitals, death) it must take on another form before it can acquire meaning. That this failure of memory occurs at the site/sight of sexuality through passionate embraces is significant.

Under what conditions are objects deformed that they become incomprehensible and must be renamed in their description? The answer is simple enough: the annihilation of tens of thousands of people in a matter of seconds. Moreover, by what means should this renaming take place and is it possible that the renaming of an object might occur by means other than language? Resnais makes a very compelling argument for the cinema as means of expressing the inexpressible, as a viable method for visualizing the conjunction of Bataille's "unseeable" objects. But Resnais goes even further than Bataille in a conceptual sense by offering one possibility for the sun, coitus and cadavers to be intolerable to the human eyes – human memory transforms these objects through the process of traumatic recollection. As such, the genius of *Hiroshima Mon Amour* resides in the ability of its narrative structure to negate the veracity of the female narrator's recollection while the apparatus provides a seemingly independent, desubjectivized depiction of the very images and objects she describes. The sun (nuclear bomb), coitus (tightly framed embrace) and cadavers – living and dead – (ashes/photographs/museum movies) are renamed and reconceived in *Hiroshima Mon Amour* through her memory.

Near the end of the opening sequence an exchange between the male and female narrators offer some astonishing insights on the relationship of memory from a subjective and objective position to the events of Hiroshima:

F: Listen to me. Like you, I know what it is to forget.

M: No, You do not know what it is to forget.

F: Like you, I am endowed with memory. I know what it is to forget.

M: No, you are not endowed with memory.

F: Like you, I have struggled with all of my might not to forget. Like you, I forgot. Like you, I longed for a memory beyond consolation, a memory of shadows and stone. For my part I struggled everyday with all of my might against *the horror of no longer understanding the reason to remember*. Like you, I forgot. Why deny the obvious necessity of remembering?

If Bataille is right and human eyes cannot tolerate the sun, coitus or cadavers, it may be Resnais' response that, as ethical beings, our memories require that we apprehend the horror of the "unseeable" in some meaningful, if deformed, way. In terms of such apprehension, the memory of "shadows and stone" the woman speaks of may refer to an actual consequence that resulted from the scorching light of the nuclear blast in Hiroshima, an effect that powerfully encapsulates all of the facets of horror raised in this chapter.

Few buildings were left standing within the radius of the blast site once the bomb detonated over Hiroshima, but accounts have been given that as the search for survivors began, on the few walls left standing curious black marks could be found. On closer inspection it was determined that the marks on the walls were the imprints left by victims who had been standing near the walls at the time of the explosion. The heat from the blast had literally flash incinerated the victims' bodies and seared their death postures to adjoining walls; no trace of the physical body could be found, all that remained, like Banksy street stencils, were the carbon imprints of the once living. These memories of shadows and stone, shadows cast against walls in spite of the absence of their source object; images captured by the flash of nuclear light; the human body made negative and exposed in the heat of "ten thousand suns" brings to mind what Gerhard Richter might have called "photography by other means."¹²⁶

These macabre shadows bear witness to the living body illuminated in blast-light and caught within the shutter of violence in which the living being, once part of the present world, is eternally rendered a representation of what it once was. Each of these shadows without a body inspires horror through their inscription of absence. It should not come as a surprise that these horrific "photographs" share an ontological dimension with the other examples of horror raised in this chapter: what Cavarero called "the destruction of uniqueness;" or what Kristeva referred to as the individual "literally placed beside himself;" or death by petrification in the gaze of the Gorgon Medusa; or "photographs" triggering the feeling of Barthes' "punctum" in the living observer who, like Hegel's bondsman, must confront "the shattering recognition of his own death;" or McCormick's description of the *negative sublime* as "apprehending... the overwhelming magnitude... of suffering and moral evil in times like ours;" or, finally, the uncanny feeling Elkins' describes of seeing the "black smudge" of a decapitated man's head in a photograph where in the man's shadow the head still appears intact, what I described earlier as horror inspired by the *over-presence* of some discernible quality in a thing that is itself objectively absent.

Thus, terror is the external, imminent possibility of violence, whereas horror is the intellectual comprehension of the infinite possibility and magnitude of evil. Horror is ontologically an impasse: the incommunicable, the unseeable, the unnamable, the unthinkable, the unpaintable, the unspeakable. This is horror as absence. And where the modern horror film and the continental horror film are separated, horror is not what lurks in the shadows; *it is the shadow itself*.

Chapter 5

Philosophies of Horror and Cinematic Experience

I. Of Pleasures and Paradoxes

Questions concerning the distinction between horror and terror have gained serious attention from the fields of literary criticism and philosophy, but in film studies these questions have essentially been ignored. If chapter 3 introduced some of the key arguments in the horror/terror debates around the Gothic novel in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, and chapter 4 expanded upon points of contrasts between horror and terror through the philosophical texts inspired by violence and warfare in the twentieth century (what has been called the most violent century in human history), then this chapter means to bring these findings to bear on film experience and the “horror” genre.

As a first step toward understanding why horror and terror have gone undistinguished in “horror” genre criticism and have been frequently conflated with one another in general, it is necessary to point out that the study of cinema has historically privileged analyses of structure over considerations of feeling. Coopting the predominant discourses of the time – structuralism of the 60s, psychoanalysis of the 70s, post-structuralism/neo-Marxism of the 80s, and various “postmodern” mishmashes of the three in the 90s – film studies aligned itself with the technically precise vocabularies of “rigorous,” “scientific” methods and, in turn, disavowed the sensory aspects of cinematic experience and its appeal to the perceptions of the lived body. Vivian Sobchack noted this predicament in her 2004 essay, “What My Fingers Knew: The Cinesthetic Subject, or Vision in the Flesh.” She writes, “the language used...to describe the sensuous and affective dimensions of film experience has been written off as a popular version of the imprecise humanist criticism drummed out of film studies in the early 1970s with the advent of more ‘rigorous’ and ‘objective’ modes of description.”¹²⁷ Similarly, that same year, Steven Shaviro also observed that, “It seems as if theorists of the past twenty years can scarcely begin their discussions without ritualistically promising to resist the insidious seductions of film.”¹²⁸ It is within these conditions of experiential and sensory disavowal that the feeling of horror *proper* in cinema falls into confusion, misapprehension and misdescription.

It is not surprising, then, that the first reception studies addressing how “horror” movies make us feel came from scholars and philosophers in the area of cognitive science, most notably, Murray Smith, Ed Tan, and Noel Carroll. Emphasizing the role of sympathy and empathy in cinematic “spectatorship,” the cognitive-scientific approach takes account of the emotional responses of audiences to fictional situations by arguing that cinematic emotions function as motivational forces to potential actions, stimulating our action tendencies that are perceived as urgent impulses for something to be done for or done by the character. For example, In *Emotion and the Structure of Narrative Film*, Ed Tan explains that film narration and viewer emotion are in fact “two sides of the same coin.” For Tan, film narration functions as a genuine emotion machine by presenting to the viewer a “complex and continually variable illusory stimulus” that plays upon the anxieties and concerns inherent to its intended demographic. The film narrative functions

like a conveyor belt that continuously provides a programmatic structure of emotional situational meaning that, as Tan says, “results in an ongoing, genuine emotional response.” But this “genuine emotional response” is described as being conditional in that the viewer must suspend disbelief and “play along” with the events presented on screen. The cognitive-scientific approach to film experience asks the question: Does someone watching a narrative feature film experience authentic emotion and, if so, what is the nature of that emotion? If the actors and their actions on screen are perceived to be real, but the characters and their situations are also understood to be fictional, am I experiencing a real emotion, or am I just pretending?

Noel Carroll’s work in *The Philosophy of Horror; or Paradoxes of the Heart* (1990) has been the definitive book length discussion theorizing “horror” movie reception and what the experience of “horror” at the cinema entails. His book aims to articulate how negative emotions associated with the horror genre paradoxically become a source of pleasure for “spectators” by formulating a sympathetic-empathetic framework for the fear-oriented pleasures “horror” movies provide. If the negative feelings surrounding murderous forces or monstrous entities typify horror genre films, Carroll asks, how do audiences transform these negative cinematic feelings into pleasurable experiences? He accounts for this phenomenon by distinguishing what he calls “art-horror” (mediated or narrativized feelings of fear, repulsion, disgust, and terror) from “natural horror” (feelings derived from actual events occurring in real life). Carroll locates the experience of art-horror in the figure of the monster and its violence, which he describes as, “. . .any . . .impure or threatening . . .being not believed to exist now according to contemporary science.”¹²⁹

Not only is the amplified, psychotic violence of the monster deemed to be threatening, but its violation of biological categories (zombies, aliens, other mutations) is also perceived as a threat. Thus, the status of impurity, which he links to disgust and fear, as an art-horror emotion is a synthesis of cognitive and evaluative features. As an emotional response to aesthetic experience, Carroll advances his argument by insisting feelings of art-horror are further supported by character responses to the monstrous threat within the fictional world, a phenomenon he refers to as a “mirroring effect.” For example, in Stanley Kubrick’s *The Shining* (1980), audiences are said to react to the growing mania of Jack Torrance (Jack Nicholson) with fear by taking their cues from the panicked responses of his terrified wife and son who are being threatened by him, and, in turn, share these emotions with them.¹³⁰

The crucial point of this sympathetic-empathetic approach (or “mirroring effect”) for Carroll lies in the fact that the characters in the fictional world of the horror film believe the threat to be authentic, yet audiences who are aware that the threat is only fictional are still able to share in the experience of negative emotions with them. It is within this empathetically linked, yet cognitively detached arrangement where he locates the viewer’s paradoxical pleasure in fear. For Carroll, “horror” audiences are knowingly engaged in the experience of art-horror and, thus, are able to make evaluative judgments regarding the objects responsible for their feelings. Carroll believes that this act of cognition is the distinguishing feature separating aesthetic emotions from natural emotions. As Carroll tells us, “Emotions involve not only physical perturbations but beliefs and thoughts about the properties of objects and situations.”¹³¹

This cognitivist formula of emotional response is foundational to Carroll's philosophy of horror and the quandaries around why people experience feelings of "horror" in relation to objects they know are not actually present. This is a seemingly irreconcilable desire to seek pleasure in negative experiences that Carroll, recalling the Gothic criticism of Laetitia Barbauld, noted in chapter 3, refers to as "a paradox of the heart." Ultimately, Carroll's philosophy of horror explains that "art-horror" transmutes negative experiences into pleasurable affects by making audience feelings "co-existentialist" with the emotions depicted on screen rather than integrated with them.

There have been a variety of critiques of the cognitive-scientific approach to the "horror" film in general and Carroll's pleasure-based critique in particular. The genre theorist Matt Hills has raised doubts if "horror" movies involve a paradox at all. Hills rejects the idea that asking "How is pleasure derived from 'horror' movies," as Carroll does, could open up a conundrum since this would imply essentializing the genre by declaring fear as the genre's defining characteristic. Tim Palmer has also made the important point that, "contrary to the unstated assumptions of most contemporary film criticism...not all filmmakers seek to charm and engage the audience in regulated, upbeat terms. Cinema need neither please nor amuse."¹³² If audiences are emotionally and empathetically entwined with the fictional world, then enjoyment is explicitly bound up with the violence, carnage and fear in the diegesis, causing positivity (audience pleasure) and negativity (intensities of feeling) to interpenetrate and give rise to new feelings colored by both intensities. But Carroll's philosophy of horror conceives of things otherwise. His co-existentialist argument emphasizes a dialogical relation between positivity on the side of the audience and negativity on the side of the diegesis, situating the pleasures of "horror" at a distance, sealed safely within the spectacle, rather than framing audience pleasure as an inter-relational engagement with the feelings inspired by a "horror" film's negative intensities.¹³³

The problem with Carroll's cognitive-scientific account of audience response patterns to watching "horror" movies is that it claims to be a philosophy of horror, while ignoring altogether what philosophy throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has had to say on matters related to horror. Existentialism, phenomenology, and vitalism are each areas of philosophical inquiry that have had a considerable amount to say on the experience of horror (though in some cases going unnamed as such), yet none of the ideas in these philosophies appear in his "philosophy of horror." There is a fundamental conflict between Carroll's account of the experience of horror in both aesthetic and philosophical terms and the aesthetic descriptions of horror in the gothic debates, or the philosophical accounts of horror found in Hegel's phenomenological description of the dilemma between the Lord and the Bondsman and the "fear of death" their encounter inspires, or Bataille's description of "solar deliquescence;" or Elkins' description of his confrontation with the images of death in *Violence in Our Times*; or Cavarero's description of millennial terrorism as a form of violence more suitably named "horrorism;" or McCormick's description of the negative sublime; or even Colonel Kurtz's description of horror for Captain Willard in *Apocalypse Now*.

From a philosophical standpoint one might say that Carroll's philosophy of horror and his use of cognitive science calls attention to a long-standing conflict between the American tradition of analytic philosophy and the European tradition of continental philosophy. While cognitive science is not exactly analytic philosophy there are

numerous areas of overlap. Carroll approaches questions of horror film reception from the field of cognitive science and analytic philosophy when continental philosophy (of which existentialism, phenomenology, and vitalism are each prominent methods) is better suited to the task. In the remaining pages of this chapter and the next, I will show that each of these areas of continental philosophy can inform a new approach to the violence in post-Wall art cinema and our general understanding of horror, while further clarifying on what grounds horror and terror are separable in cinema.

Beyond the Cognitive Approach to Horror

The most thorough and sweeping attempt at a reconsideration of Carroll's understanding of pleasure in horror movies and the cognitive-scientific position in general has most recently come from Julian Hanich in his 2011 book *Cinematic Emotions in Horror Films and Thrillers: The Aesthetic Paradox of Pleasurable Fear*. Hanich finds the cognitive approach to the pleasures of horror movies unconvincing and believes Carroll's argument fails on two fronts: 1) In arguing that audiences derive pleasure from the satisfaction of cognitive interest in the monster and the fascination in the discovery and disclosure of the monster through narrative progression, Carroll overemphasizes the cognitive aspects of the experience and overintellectualizes the reception of these films. 2) Hanich points out that Carroll both denigrates the viewer's emotional experience and situates pleasure *outside of fear* by maintaining that the emotion of art-horror – commingling of fear and disgust – is unpleasant and merely the price to be paid for the pleasure of satisfied interest. As Hanich concludes, “Both arguments are counterintuitive.”¹³⁴

Hanich calls this the “paradox of pleasurable fear,” (an obvious play on Carroll's “paradox of the heart”), separating himself from theorists like Carroll and others who debate the pleasures of horror or specific functions of aesthetic pleasure. Hanich argues instead for the pleasure of fear more generally. He writes, “Since canonical emotion terms may not do justice to the emotions evoked by many films, it is necessary to come up with new or rarely used ones to label those types of fear more accurately. I call them direct horror, suggested horror, cinematic shock, cinematic dread, and cinematic terror.”¹³⁵ For Hanich, dread and terror are frightening versions of the larger category of suspense and each of these dimensions of fear have border case emotions against which they lay edge to edge.

Cognitivist philosophers and film scholars are concerned with the thinking part of an emotion – the evaluation or judgment about the object of the emotion – approaching the emotional experience as epiphenomenal. Conversely, phenomenologists consider *how it is like* to be in a certain emotional state.¹³⁶ Where Hanich's phenomenology significantly diverges from Carroll's cognitive approach is in Hanich's insistence that the separation between “art-horror” and natural horror insufficiently accounts for the conflicting range between negative feelings and aesthetic pleasures that horror movies inspire. For Hanich, the five categories of fear are foremost separable on the grounds that they “entail different temporal and lived-experiences.”¹³⁷ He believes that there are differences in terms of pleasure and that emotions are almost always double-sided, but notes that in the literature on emotions only one side of the coin tends to be recognized.

Under certain circumstances fear can have a positive, pleasurable side and, thus, when both sides of the proverbial coin are taken into account, the paradox of fear must evaporate. Fear in cinema can enable affective moments in the lived body and temporal intensity just as it may allow for valuable instances of collectivity and belongingness. This, Hanich insists, is “precisely because negative, long-term, real-life fear and positive, imminent, cinematic fear are hardly on the same level, there is no need to draw a tight connection between them: the latter does not control, master or cathartically purge the former.” This observation leads Hanich to conclude, contra Robin Wood’s analysis of the horror film through the filters of Marx and Freud, that cinematic fear does not help us to confront the angst of contemporary life. Instead, it is more plausible to look at how the experience of scary movies counterbalances the transformations brought about by the process of civilization and modernization. Thus, the pleasure of fear derives from a sense of both a strong individualized immersion and a collective experience.¹³⁸

In light of Hanich’s claims, I argue that the emergence of the continental horror film is a pivot point on which a turn to feeling-based approaches to cinema can be productive. Not only does the continental horror film rupture the generic paradigm of the modern American horror film, clearing a path for it to inspire its titular effect, it also instantiates a rupture that unsettles cognitive theories of reception that have, until recently, defined the study of the horror genre. With the horror film there has never been a need to speak of a turn to affects and the body, for the horror film has never left the body. With this so-called return to the body in world art cinema – French cinema in particular – the American horror film immediately became a fruitful and logical area of exploitation for art cinema’s emerging concerns with the body. This return to the body in cinema has been accompanied by a so-called “turn” to affects in film theory and film philosophy. As Tarja Laine points out in her recent book *Feeling Cinema*, “Fortunately the ‘affective turn’ in contemporary film theory seems to have deliberately moved away from the cinema as an objectively readable text, and toward the cinematic as an emotionally experiential event.”¹³⁹ Understanding the nature of this widespread turn to affects will get to one of the questions that lies at the heart of this dissertation: *why has the horror genre’s relation to the actual feeling of horror as it has been described and defined in the literature and philosophy of the 20th century been ignored?* As noted in chapter 3, drawing distinctions between horror and terror was among the central debates in gothic literature.

Why did a debate around feeling states not receive further speculation when gothic stories began to be interpreted through the “emotion machine” of the cinema? An important, potential answer concerns a deeply-seeded contradiction between the anti-experiential, object-oriented critical discourses that were considered legitimate methods for the “rigorous” examination of films in the twentieth century and the types of writing and thinking that addressed the feeling of horror from the nineteenth century onward: the proto-existential philosophy of Nietzsche in *Beyond Good and Evil*, or Soren Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling*; the existential philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre in *Being and Nothingness*, and Emmanuel Levinas’ phenomenology of horror in *Existence and Existents*, to say nothing of the literature that has attended to the feeling of genuine horror by authors as diverse as Shakespeare (*Hamlet*, *MacBeth*), Dostoyevsky (*Notes From the Underground*), Camus (*The Stranger*), Sartre (*Nausea*), and Weisel (*Night*), to name only a few of the most obvious examples.

Why has the feeling of horror not been considered in philosophical terms as it was written about in continental philosophy? Furthermore, why has the horror/terror debate not carried over into film theory or film criticism? The reemergence of concerns around lived experience in recent critical literature on cinematic reception is making serious contributions to the long overdue demolition work needed to get past various structuralisms that have dominated the study of cinema. The goal of such work is to return to the experience of film *experience itself*, and, in turn, to engage in descriptions of that experience. Now the study of horror as immediate experience is being taken up in what I prefer to call an *affective re-turn*. This shift in the critical reception of aesthetics follows the work of Sianne Ngai's *Ugly Feelings* and *Our Aesthetic Categories*, Steven Shaviro's *Post-Cinematic Affect*, and a variety of Deleuzian approaches, with work explicitly on horror found in Tarja Laine's *Feeling Cinema* and Julian Hanich's aforementioned *Cinematic Emotions in Horror Films and Thrillers*. Hanich's work is the most robust contribution to the question of horror and terror and how these feelings are communicated through cinema to date. Therefore, it will require further examination in the pages to come.

The Affective (Re)Turn

The transition from the second phase to the third phase of the horror film occurs against the background of this so-called "affective turn" in not only media studies of the past two decades, but across all of the humanities, from women's studies and anthropology to cultural studies and sociology.¹⁴⁰ What has generally been regarded as an "affective turn" in media studies can be described as a shift that began arguably with the publication of Gilles Deleuze's *Cinema 1: The Movement Image* and *Cinema 2: The Time Image* in the mid-1980s. In the early 1990s books interpreting cinema through the filter of phenomenology by Allan Casebier (*Film and Phenomenology*) and Vivian Sobchack (*The Address of the Eye: Phenomenology and Film Experience*) championed thinking about cinema outside of the dominant paradigms of semiology, structuralism and psychoanalytic theory. In roughly the past decade ever more emphasis has been placed upon reconsidering Andre Bazin's famous question, "what is cinema?" And the related, but often ignored question: how does cinema make us feel? It is also a response to recent trends in world cinema that emphasize tactility, the body, and feeling through story, form and image-making. But this shift in thinking is not so much an "affective turn" as it is an affective *re-turn* to thinking about how the cinema addresses viewers, or what is rightfully becoming a more common term of reference, its *participants*.

Before the confluence of Freud, Sausurre, and Marx on the study of cinema and the theoretical paradigms their work gave rise to, considering the feelings and "participation" between viewers and the cinematic text was accepted critical practice. I would like to revisit three seminal cases from different periods of thinking about film, each separated by four decades: two cases before the "grand paradigms" took root in the 1960s, the first from psychologist Hugo Münsterberg prior to the 1920s, and the second from film critic Edgar Morin in the mid-1950s. The third case examines the emergence of phenomenological approaches in film studies as the "grand paradigms" were being pushed aside in the 1990s. This will not only help to place the transition from a cognitive account of the horror film like Carroll's to a phenomenological account of the horror film

like Hanich's in new light when considered in the context of feeling-based studies from early to mid-century, but it will also help to situate the so-called affective turn in cinema in a broader historical context.

As early as 1915, Hugo Münsterberg's psychological study of the "photoplay" had already expressed ideas regarding the emotions of the spectator. For Münsterberg, the subject of emotions in relation to cinema formed two group cases: "On the one side, we have those emotions in which the feelings of the persons in the play are transmitted to our own soul. On the other side, we find those feelings with which we respond to the scenes in the play, feelings which may be entirely different, perhaps exactly opposite to those which the figures in the play express."¹⁴¹ When Münsterberg says the feelings of the persons in the play are transmitted to our own soul he is suggesting we are intimately in contact with the emotions we see played out in the fiction on screen; pain, love, sadness are all directly transmissible. Using proto-cognitive-psychological language, Münsterberg states, "The visual perception of the various forms of expression of these emotions fuses in our mind with the conscious awareness of the emotion expressed."¹⁴² Although Carroll does not cite Münsterberg when elaborating his theory of art-horror and aesthetic emotion, his cognitive/evaluative argument seems in part to be conversant with Münsterberg's position.

But Münsterberg's thinking does not remain circumscribed by psychological consideration alone as he also describes how emotions are inspired. Summing up this first group case of emotion response to cinema, Münsterberg writes, "The horror which we see makes us really shrink...the pain which we observe brings contraction in our muscles; and all the resulting sensations...gives color of living experience to the emotional reflection in our mind."¹⁴³ Here Münsterberg expands the range of emotional experience beyond the epiphenomenal sphere of a cognitive/evaluative model by implicating the corporeality of emotional experience and the life of the body in cognitive judgments over emotional states. Although Carroll makes it explicit that "the emotion of art-horror can be determined through physiological states..." which would seem to suggest some correspondence with Münsterberg's position, Münsterberg goes further when declaring, "It is obvious that for this leading group of emotions the relation of the pictures to the feelings of the persons in the play and to the feelings of the spectator is exactly the same." Unlike Carroll, Münsterberg feels no need to argue for the distinction between aesthetic experience and real experience, and in a remarkable turn that appears to move him into phenomenological territory vaguely resembling what will come to characterize Vivian Sobchack's phenomenology of film experience 80 years later, Münsterberg proclaims, "If we start from the emotions of the audience, we can say that the pain and the joy which the spectator feels are really projected to the screen, projected both into the portraits of the persons and into the pictures of the scenery and background into which the personal emotions radiate."¹⁴⁴

In *The Address of the Eye*, Sobchack, taking her cue from Maurice Merleau-Ponty, believes that inherent to the very nature of cinematic experience is the "exchange and reversibility of expression and perception," a belief she relies upon to argue for cinematic experience as foremost an "expression of experience by experience."¹⁴⁵ She insists that the dominant thinking on cinema over the course of the 20th century widely disregards the fluid and organic relationship between the always-already intertwined perceptual/expressive activity of the "spectator" and the manner in which cinema

rearticulates that very activity. By privileging the site of the “spectator’s” body and the fluid mechanisms of perception and expression as always-already at work and mediated by the very fact of one’s being-in-the-world and, more radically, by conferring the same phenomenologically reversible operations of consciousness as an activity of perception and expression upon the cinematic apparatus itself, Sobchack collapses the discrete categories of perception, expression and mediation she sees film theory’s dominant narratives (Psychoanalytic theory, Structuralism, Narratology...) propped up upon. This phenomenological orientation toward film experience leads Sobchack to the belief that “film experience cannot be considered a monologic one between a viewing subject and a viewed object. Rather, it is a dialogical and dialectical engagement of two viewing subjects who also exist as visible objects.”¹⁴⁶

Münsterberg’s concluding remarks regarding his first group case on the subject of emotions in film experience are very much in line with Sobchack’s claim that film experience is dialogical and phenomenologically reversible. Münsterberg’s notion that it is the “spectator” who projects the pain and joy she feels to the screen implies the “dialectical engagement” Sobchack insists lies at the heart of film experience. Presumably, the screen has already given the emotions Münsterberg’s spectator projects to the screen to her, and her return of these feelings marks the inherently reciprocal nature of film experience between body and “film body.” Not merely the cognitive recognition of a character’s emotional state whose feelings we participate in within the artifice of the experience, but rather, a “touching” between the two. More radically, Münsterberg insists the spectator is not content to merely project her feelings toward the “portrait of the person,”¹⁴⁷ but projects feelings into “the scenery and background into which the personal emotions radiate.” For Münsterberg it is the entire medium that is charged with the affective content of this reciprocal relation – not simply between “spectator” and diegetic character, but a feeling relation between “spectator” and spectacle.

In *The Cinema, or The Imaginary Man*, Edgar Morin would draw similar observations on the nature of cinema to Münsterberg, though more emphatically. Writing at the nascent moment of the *Nouvelle Vague*, Morin observes, “Projection is built into our very perception. In identification, the subject, instead of projecting himself onto the world, absorbs the world into himself. Identification incorporates the environment into the self and integrates it affectively”¹⁴⁸ Morin advances Münsterberg’s claims by suggesting a similar act of projection, one in which emotion is directed outward not toward a single point, but to radiate the horizon of the visible world, is an ontological aspect of perception. For Morin, the act of identification transcends any empirical recognition of an other with whom the subject is called upon to share an emotional state (Carroll’s cognitive/evaluative model). Identification and projection are read as a process deeply implicated *in* and *with* the world, a process in which the lived space of experience acquires meaning affectively and whose coherence maintains a primarily affective character. Describing in his own terms the relation between the spectator and her fictional counterpart (what Carroll described as the mirroring effect), Morin offers these remarkable words:

[For the spectator] The double possesses the psychic, affective quality of the image but in an alienated, magical form. Between the poles of the magical double and the image-emotion lies a fluid, syncretic zone that we call the

domain of sentiment, the soul, the heart...*Between magic and subjectivity spreads an uncertain nebula, which goes beyond man, without, however, detaching itself from him. We refer to or designate its manifestations with words of soul, heart, feeling. This magma, which has elements of both magic and subjectivity, is neither magic nor subjectivity, properly speaking. It is the kingdom of projection-identification or affective participation.*¹⁴⁹

In this evocative passage, Morin interprets aesthetic experience not as divisible from real experience, nor does he believe experience between the self and the image to be reducible to a so neatly expressed supposition as: *aesthetic experience and real experience occur in different registers*. Morin draws upon an aqueous analogy to emphasize the persistence of contact between subjectivity and the magical form of the double. Although this “uncertain nebula” in which affect circulates around and between the subject and the image-emotion is nameable only through the passionate objects of “the soul” and “the heart,” what is certain is the fluid nature of this experience that keeps these poles in contact.

The Question of Fear

Before cinema was considered a language or a form of discourse, before it was regarded as a wellspring of coded desires and fetishisms, the experience of cinema and the emotions it inspires was central to its critical reception. As it concerns the contemporary study of the horror movie, the affective re-turn has emphasized one emotion above all: Fear. Hanich indicates that the five types of fear he is arguing for each diverge in terms of intentionality and experience. Hanich believes that the word fear functions as an umbrella term that encompasses emotional states that are sufficiently close to each other as well as to fear in everyday life to deserve this single name. I do not believe the term, however broadly Hanich may wish to make its meaning stretch, can account sufficiently for the nuances of all the negative feelings he hopes to encapsulate in his understanding of fear.

As the philosopher Andrew Winters has noted, “The phenomenological approach is in stark contrast to what contemporary philosophers take to be an analytic (or cognitive) approach. When applying the analytic method to an emotion such as fear, the emotion is analyzed from the third person perspective by attempting to understand the objective features of fear that others would be able to observe.” Winters draws attention to the fact that in the cognitive framework fear is understood as a concept to which a definition is ascribed. “By formulating a definition of fear,” Winters writes, “the philosopher is then able to provide a framework for understanding what fear is like in light of the events that evoke fear.” The aim of this approach is to provide an analysis of the concept of fear and to understand how fear functions in the world beyond our experiences. Analytic philosophers might go on to identify the emotional state of fear with chemical processes in the brain, and so they give a neurological account, discussing the chemical processes that transpire when a person experiences fear, as Carroll and other film cognition scholars have developed into a methodology.¹⁵⁰

Hanich argues that a phenomenological understanding of how audiences accommodate negative feelings in cinematic experience is needed in order to think outside the cognitive-science framework that has dominated the study of horror film reception for more than three decades. In Hanich's estimation, audience reactions to horror films comprise more than a mere change of the measurable, physiological body. What is often referred to as (bodily) feeling often comes down to the self-awareness of one's sweaty palms or increased heart rate. But, as Hanich argues, "the emotion of fear also involves a remarkable change of the lived-body, spatial, temporal, and intersubjective experience." Fear, for example, generally brings about a gradual, sometimes unexpected shift in our perception of ourselves and our relation to the world. This transformation is said to mark a breach – an inter-ruption – in the continuity of our experience, coloring the world differently and thus standing out from the more uneventful flow of life.

When Hanich writes, "narrowed attentional focus...comes with a phenomenological (not geographical) closeness of the intentional object that seems to press in on us and that we wish to flee," this description accords succinctly with how I have described the feeling of terror throughout this dissertation. "At the same time," he adds, "the lived-body is experienced differently; we literally feel it foregrounded in a specific way. For instance, a certain form of centripetal constriction – connected to the experiential closeness of the threatening object – seems to tighten and compress us. There is a meaningful change in terms of our experience of time, which becomes very dense and intense." Hanich identifies three aspects to the experience of frightening movies his study is based upon: constriction, kinaesthesia and depth. He argues that during horrifying and terrifying scenes the threat presented by the horror movie may appear phenomenologically close. The viewer is said to experience fear from the proximity of the threatening object as a "constriction of the lived body."¹⁵¹

Fear is also characterized by an expansive tendency, a wish to "escape the lived-body's constriction." Hanich describes this metaphysical movement between constriction and expansion in the experience of fear as a "pulsating tension." This play between constriction and expansion in aesthetic experience of fear is part of the pre-cognitive pleasures of the "horror" movie experience. In his/her position of immobility before the screen, the viewer is said to make kinaesthetic contact with the action on screen through empathetic observation. "Hence terror," as Hanich tells us, "puts the viewer into a state of acceleration and agitation, whereas dread is defined by an experience of immobility and dead silence."¹⁵² The body itself can absorb deep negativity and develop reflexive responses and behaviors at a proprioceptive level far removed from psychological determinations.¹⁵³ In the context of a culture of disembodiment, cinematic fear is said to awaken our slumbering bodies by literally moving them into awareness and aliveness. Thus, Hanich rejects the use of cognitive scientific and psychological approaches to the study of negative feelings in cinematic experience and its insistence on accounting for feelings as recorded data. While important research has been conducted and valuable findings have been made in this area of audience research and reception practice, Hanich believes that whatever the gains that have been achieved by these methods, they cannot overcome a significant methodological inadequacy in their inability to provide a description of the viewer's experience.

In *Feeling Cinema*, Tarja Laine coins the term “horror-fear” – a term that only further obscures the meaning of horror – to describe how “spectators of horror regularly experience fear toward the film, more or less simultaneously with the characters in the film feeling fearful toward its fierce creatures, fear is not what the film itself embodies.” In contradistinction to the cognitive account of horror movie spectatorship, Laine argues that the horror movie “spectator’s” emotion is not an occasion of empathy in which the audience shares the film character’s fear, it is, rather, an “immediate and autonomous engagement in the process of emotional exchange between the film and the spectator.”¹⁵⁴

Laine observes that in cinematic experience we are neither merely outside observers, nor are we fixed in static positions within the cinematic scene. “By contrast we are part of cinema in its emotional eventfulness. The experience is a cyclical, rather than linear, process in which our affective (“bodily”) and cognitive (“cerebral”) states are inextricably intertwined.”¹⁵⁵ This sense of being neither in a strictly external situation where cinematic experience is regarded as a subject/object relation, or in a purely immersive situation wherein we are wholly unanchored from reality, but rather in a “cyclical” situation recalls Sobchack’s phenomenological position that cinematic experience is reversible and intersubjective. But Laine adopts a more moderate position as she suggests that cinematic experience is not solely an affective or bodily encounter and that cognitive aspects play a role as cognition and affect are inextricably intertwined.

She also points out that “cinematic emotions should not be recollected as components, as indicators for their object’s properties for instance, but as processes that are intentional in a phenomenological sense, supporting the continuous, and dynamic exchange between the film’s world and the spectator’s world.”¹⁵⁶ She endorses a hermeneutical stance that requires a methodology in which scholars position themselves as critical and attentive participants within the cinematic event. Laine insists that, “the cinematic event as ‘mutual exposure’ means, that in order for the film’s and the spectator’s emotional configurations to be able to ‘meet,’ both parties must ‘exit themselves,’ so as to come into contact with each other in the manner of ‘being-with.’”¹⁵⁷ Cinema, therefore, is emotionally participatory; we resonate and exchange its affective energy even if we are not always open to this current of emotional reciprocity. As Laine concludes, “In cinema what truly binds the spectator to the film, is the very act of participation in the co-creation of the cinematic event as a whole. Therefore the nature of cinema as an emotional event can only be accurately comprehended by making sense *with* instead of making sense *of* cinema.”¹⁵⁸

II. A Phenomenology of Horror and Beyond

What can phenomenology contribute to the study of horror?¹⁵⁹ Both Sobchack and Allan Casebier emphasize experience as being central to their phenomenological approaches. Hanich, too, insists that phenomenology is defined by its focus on lived experience. Phenomenology is also the study of appearances and the naming of appearances. Violence in certain instances of its appearance inspires horror. Therefore, in cases where horror may be inspired by the appearance of violence, it is not reducible to its appearance alone. Horror does not inhere at the site of violence or its appearance and it is for this reason why “horror” movies rarely inspire the feelings it seems to lay claim

upon. Horror transcends the physical and expands outward from reflective activities in memory and the imaginary. This is horror's temporal aspect. When the woman in *Hiroshima Mon Amour* recounts the horror of the bomb she relies upon the inscription of destruction on objects found at the blast site and consequently she invents memories of her being present at the moment of the bomb's detonation. While it is often related to a supposed constellation of similar terms like dread and shock, horror with respect to violence is singular in this regard. Space and time are actors in horror and this is why phenomenology is well suited to the task of an inquiry into horror, for phenomenology is concerned with the space and time of experience.

The phenomenological approaches of Casebier and Sobchack, Hanich and Jenny Chamrette, the sensation based approach of Shaviro via Deleuze and the feeling based approach of Laine make it clear that film theory has ignored the affective and experiential dimensions of the cinematic encounter. There are many dimensions to a phenomenological encounter with cinema, but I wish to narrow focus to the experience of horror specifically. The *affective re-turn* in film theory and the turn to the body in post-Wall art cinema, which occur almost simultaneously, can help to illuminate why the idea of a "new extremism" (examined in chapter 1) is a grossly reductive term for the films it means to organize. A phenomenological approach to horror and to the post-Wall art films I am calling continental horror films can be thoughtfully considered through the categories of *participation* and *relationality*.

Any phenomenology of cinema must address the ways in which the audience and the movie come into contact and appear to one another. I want to frame these two phenomenological categories in the context of the constriction and expansion model noted above. Hanich's observations on constriction alert us to the homologous experiential relationship between the "film body" (Sobchack) and the participant's body, as both undergo various forms of constriction and expansion. This model of constriction and expansion makes clear that the horror movie experience is by its very nature a phenomenological encounter characterized by relationality, mimicry and exchange in which the "physiology" of both the "film body" and the participant's body actively respond to each other and are subsequently affected by each other.

"Horror" movies are constantly undergoing a process of constriction and expansion over the course of their duration. When a character is imperiled by a threat and we know that the character will soon be killed, or when a character is exploring a basement, or an attic, or a wooded area in the dark, the film conveys a feeling of constriction and this feeling is registered in the body of the participant. As the film body constricts, the participant's body constricts with it. When we learn that it is only a cat in the woods after it has jumped out from behind a tree, or that the creaking in the attic was only a rat, or even if it is in fact the monster who then kills the character we are focused on, what follows is a loosening of the sense of constriction through the film allowing for a certain degree of relaxation and an expansion of diegetic space. Thus, as the film body reacts, the participant's body is also cued to react. It is the task of a phenomenological approach to cinema to address this reciprocity and to understand how these feelings are not only represented on screen, but also transmitted through the screen.

Horror, however it may be inspired, as unmediated experience or as "experience by experience" through mediated (re)presentation, remains irreducibly a matter of relationality. As Tim Palmer has noted, the *cinema du corps* has been characterized as

“portraying contemporary society as isolating, unpredictably horrific and threatening, a nightmarish series of encounters in which personal relationships – families, couples, friendships, partnerships – disintegrate and fail.”¹⁶⁰ But at the center of this cycle, argues Palmer, is the dark, graphic depiction of human sexuality, a tendency, he says, that is crystallized in Claire Denis’ *Trouble Every Day*. Palmer explains that *Trouble Every Day* is exemplary of an impulse in French cinema to emphasize the sexual capacities of the body through an increasingly explicit dissection of the human form. Sexual encounters are rendered through “unmotivated or predatory sex, sexual conflicts, male and female rape, disaffected and emotionless sex, ambiguously consensual sexual encounters, arbitrary sex stripped of conventional or even nominal gestures of solidarity.” I mean to shift the focus of these images of sexuality in *Trouble Every Day* away from the level of their immediate presentation and to consider the conceptual ideas these images of sex are mobilizing around how individuals are compelled to relate to one another in a bodily way.

Martine Beugnet argues that while Denis’ film contains scenes of “graphic horror” it is not meant to emulate strategies of successful horror or gore features. For Beugnet, “Denis’ film is a film of terror rather than a horror or gore feature, a work that elaborates an aesthetic of dread or angst rather than one systematic, plethoric shock and disgust.”¹⁶¹ Though I would disagree with the idea that it is a work of terror (it accords in no way with “terror” as I have described it in this dissertation; in fact, shock and disgust are more traits of terror than horror), there is certainly an aesthetic of dread at work. As *Trouble Every Day* is regarded as the seminal case of this tendency, I believe a close phenomenological reading of the film reveals that it is less concerned with dark, graphic depictions of sexuality than it is with fundamental problems of relationality (or relationality as a fundamental problem of the human condition).

I find the term *cinema du corps* to be misleading as it effaces the nuances of how bodies are depicted, displayed, and function in the diegeses of these films. In this light, a film like *Trouble Every Day* can be seen to be more than “orgiastic bloodletting” or “extremity,” and can instead be seen as a film about human contact: its violence, its pleasure, and its absolute necessity. By employing a phenomenological method that brackets external theories or discourses that may influence as interpretive engagement with the film, and offering a description of the sensuous materiality of the film itself as the primary mode of critical engagement, I believe we can gain a more clear-eyed understanding of the film’s images and its violence as an expression of the power of relationality.

Trouble Every Day

In the opening scene of Denis’ *Trouble Every Day* a dim luminary light catches the top of a woman’s head. This semi-vertical trace of light across her hair pulled back into a bun is the brightest point in an otherwise very dark image and gives us our first clue as to what we are looking at. The source light pours through the top left corner of the frame and seems to be diffused through what looks to be frosted glass (Is this moisture? Was the glass blown this way? Is this simply the condition of an optical quirk between this light and that surface?) The semi-vertical trace of light across the woman’s head in relation to its source tells us the woman is partially horizontal. Her forehead and nose-

bridge catch the light; a vague though definite silhouette is made visible. This light also catches the forehead, nose-bridge and chin of another face, the face of a man within radius of her breath.

The camera is observing a place where a man and a woman are in intimate contact with one another. We appear to be looking into a closed space; the diffused source light from the left of the frame, the semi-horizontal position of the bodies and the presence of some obscuring feature in the foreground of the image, what seems to be an open window frame; these details suggest that we are outside of a car looking in (but we could be anywhere, the space is indeterminate). The camera is close; the image is dark; the frame is tight. Initially, these silhouetted faces serve only the most objective purpose, as surfaces reflecting just enough light to illuminate the image. But when the faces come together, to kiss, to give and receive pleasure reciprocally, the image goes dark. In the coming together of these faces the objective functionality of the face as a reflective surface for the luminary source light, the means by which we were able to distinguish two individuals, two uniquenesses, two subjectivities, is lost. Features of these silhouettes once distinguishable – chin, nose, forehead, lips; loci of subjectivity – retreat into the darkness of an indeterminate space. Submerged in this darkness is a kiss. Because the light cannot strike any distinguishing feature at the moment of the kiss we are cast into temporary obscurity; and so the camera wavers, as if from our point of view, searching through slight adjustments of perspective for a new position that may again grant us enough light to make the couple available to our vision.



Figure 4: Lovers in the dark.

A second image fades in. The dark surface of a body of water shimmers from several pillars of light, reflecting the orange glow of nearby street lamps. A dissolve expands the perimeter of this space and we can see now that the body of water is an urban river flowing from left to right along a concrete wall toward a small bridge, still shimmering from the three pillars of light – two orange, one white – in the foreground of the frame. A

time-lapse dissolve follows and further expands its perimeter. A crepuscular horizon is beginning to brighten the river and the dark spaces along its edges. The water still shimmers, now awash in natural light. After a moment, the opening credits fade in and the title graphics take on an effect resembling the shimmers of the water we have just seen. This opening sequence, otherwise out of place in the narrative, serves as a cipher for the film as a whole.



Figure 5: Pillars of light on water.



Figure 6: Dawn dissipates the night.

These peculiar images that open the film do not function as establishing shots in any traditional sense, for they establish nothing concretely that pertains to the plot or story, or appears to serve any expository purpose. In the scene that follows the opening credits there is no indication that we are in or around the river that precedes the credits, nor is there any indication that the kissing silhouettes cloaked in darkness are ever identified by the light of day. We are not returned to the river in the sequence following the credits and there is no suggestion that the couple who have shared this nighttime kiss are characters in the film. But these obscure images are not without purpose for what these shots do thematize is the film's principle motif: relationality.

In her recent book *Flesh of My Flesh*, Kaja Silverman, recalling scenes from Terence Malick's *The Thin Red Line* (1998), identifies similar elements linked to themes of relationality. She argues that when characters are in contact with one another near bodies of water these moments radiate an "oceanic feeling," what she describes as "a sentiment or sensation that discloses to us that we are part of a limitless Whole."¹⁶² It is against the horizon of these insights that identifying the couple kissing in the car or trying to determine how they establish narrative time and space becomes peripheral. What these first images of Denis' film firmly assert, and what the rest of film corroborates, is the significance of shared touch in both a localized and global sense: an oceanic feeling.

A woman is picked up by a truck driver, the woman kills the truck driver, her husband (though this is not revealed until much later) finds her sitting near the body looking blankly into the distance, blood smeared across her mouth. She is framed in a tight shot with red light from an unknown source illuminating her face, emphasizing the blood smeared on her chin and cheeks. He approaches her from behind and tenderly strokes her hair and neck. In medium-close-up the man leans over her shoulder and gently kisses her cheek several times before wrapping his arms around her and embracing her. He moves his hands up along her jawline, softly caressing her face. She adjusts her neck and face to meet his touch, looking directly above to meet his eyes with hers. He kisses her once again on the forehead before looking up and out of frame. In this first scene of violence Denis only provides the aftermath. We are not made privy to the conversation or actions that led the woman to ride with the truck driver, and more importantly we do not see the murder of the truck driver or any of the violence unleashed upon him. The violence is absent and we are left only with its indexical traces – traces signifying the absent body of the other.

In the following scene we see another man and woman (Vincent Gallo as Shane Brown and Tricia Vessey as June Brown play husband and wife) both looking out of an airplane window; the small, illuminated window frame against the surrounding darkness of a night sky giving the impression of being a small portraiture of the couple. When the camera cuts inside the airplane's cabin, Denis keeps the couple tightly framed. Few words are spoken between the newlyweds, but the camera takes its time tracing their shared looks and mutual caresses. Some time has passed after the next cut and the passengers in the cabin are now sleeping. Shane leaves his seat and enters a bathroom stall. Once inside we find him sitting curled up; he buries his head in his arms, an alarming image has seized him: he is having a vision of his wife soaked in blood almost to the point where we cannot make out her identity. She lies drenched in blood in a bed covered in bloodied sheets. The fantasmatic image rattles and vibrates, signifying its attachment to Shane's consciousness and the turbulence in the airplane's lavatory. It

seems she is naked under these crimson covers, the wet fabric clinging to her body and giving an impression of her curves; the scene's erotic overtones are unmistakable. Shane is snapped back into reality by a flight attendant knocking on the door. He returns to his seat, his wife turns to him and lays in his lap, he embraces her.



Figure 7: Shane and his wife toast to their marriage.

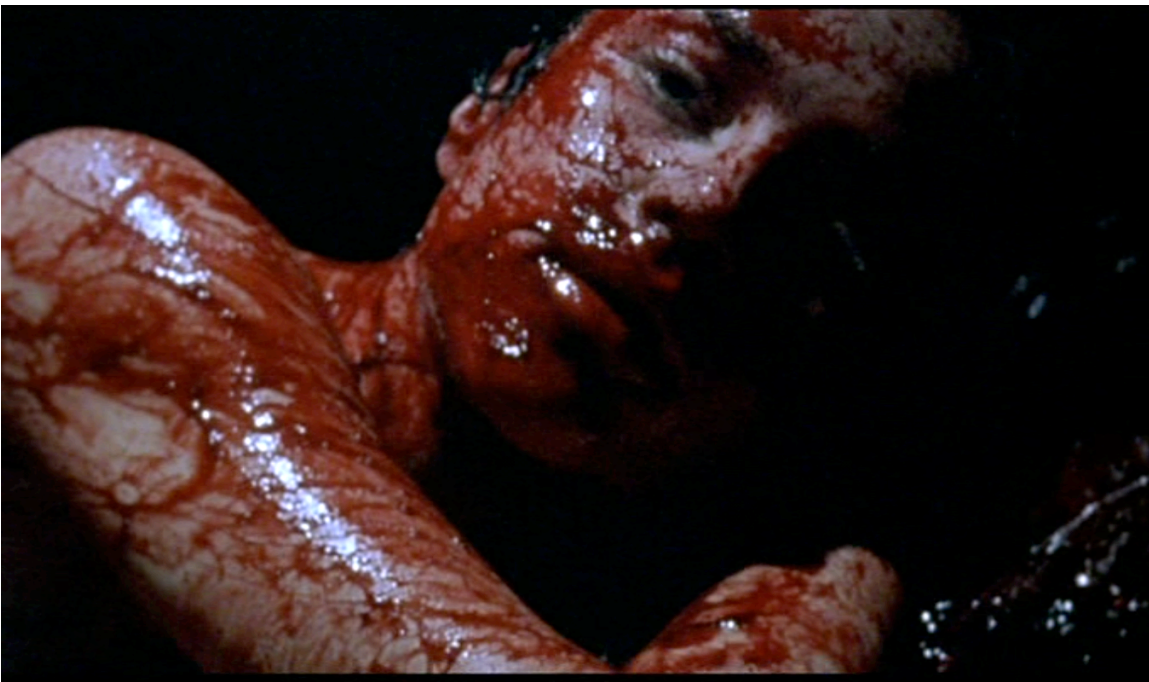


Figure 8: Shane envisions his wife soaked in blood.

Moments later Denis' camera returns to the first couple (Alex Ducas as Leo and Beatrice Dalle as Core play husband and wife). We find them together in a bedroom, and again, using suggestion as a narrative device, we are able to deduce Leo has taken the responsibility of caring for Core who may be ill. They soon embrace, silently expressing their passion for each other. They tumble on to the bed and kiss. She becomes aggressive, grabbing the back of his head and licking his lips. Leo exerts enough force to indicate her aggression is unwanted. Without saying a word he rises from the bed, leaves the room and closes the door behind him before locking Core in.

Through Denis' use of ambiguity and suggestion in these opening scenes (close to the first fifteen minutes of screen time) we are not exposed to the acts of violence which obviously motivate the actions and gestures of characters and, also apparent to some degree, their interactions with one another. Though the actual violence remains clandestine at this time, the specter of violence looms large. What is instead emphasized – unmistakably emphasized – is a sense of interdependency between both couples; a reciprocity of desire expressed through mutual embrace and touch. This gesture of mutual embrace between the film's two central couples is of such importance to Denis' camera it is essentially the only action it captures in the film's opening act. But these embraces have an aura of violence about them, and though initially unavailable to us, we are eventually confronted with its spectacle.

Three Scenes of Violence

1. Leo, a disgraced physician, cleans the blood from Core's body, as she lies supine and docile, submitting to the sponge in his hand gently scrubbing the blood. He holds her hand as she turns toward him and rests her forehead in his chest. With both of her hands she cups his right hand and rubs it vigorously. The scene concludes with the doctor running his hand over her naked shoulder and back. In a later moment, we see the doctor digging a hole in a field one can safely presume is for the purpose of burying one of his wife's victims. As the doctor digs a makeshift grave, Denis cuts to Core sitting in the passenger seat of a parked car. Tellingly, she sits there, waiting; distracted; her eyes shifting listlessly from side to side, she mumbles inaudibly: the whole scene evokes the image of a child left waiting in the car while her father tends to pumping gas or retrieving the evening's pick-up order from a fast food restaurant. The placidity of this moment; its stillness of mood; its slowness of rhythm, the care Denis takes to articulate the dynamic of a most strange mutual dependency between man and woman expressed in grammars of blood-letting and an aggregating death toll, in an unspoken arrangement where contingent circumstances have cast the couple in roles which each bespeak in their entirety the mutual necessity of the other.

2. Two neighbors invade Leo's home and ransack his lab. The more persistent of the two men makes his way upstairs and finds a room boarded up with Leo's wife on the other side of a makeshift barrier – their attraction is wordless; immediate: we have the one, the other, and their encounter. Their initial shared looks quickly turn to gazes radiating desire for one another. He rests his hand on an opening between the boards sealing the doorway. Core slips her hands along the board until it meets his hand, until

they are touching – their fingers interlock. Denis is careful to emphasize this gesture with the slightest of pans away from their faces toward the mutual point of contact between their bodies: fingers slip in and out of grasp, they run their fingertips along each other's palms, their hands slip back into an interlocking embrace. They struggle to kiss between what little space the diagonally wedged wood will allow. He touches her face; she licks his lips; the sound of their breathing is immense, hyperreal even; seemingly closer than the image suggests, which is saying something indeed for Denis' camera would have to struggle to draw any closer to these bodies. Flush with passion the man pulls savagely at the boards blockading the fulfillment of his desires, ripping them one by one from the doorframe. Core raises her nightgown, revealing her shadow-casted sex. The camera cuts to a bed with these two bodies writhing on top of one another. Here Denis' camera uses extreme close-ups to trace the couple's bodies, so close is the corporeal terrain that it is almost indeterminate (Are we seeing a neck? A thigh? Are we above or below the naval? Is this a man or woman?) Flesh consumes the frame, identities are now elided, we have now only flesh, touch and mutual embrace; or better yet, the reciprocity of mutual touching: relationality.



Figure 9: Man rips off protective barrier to get to Core.



Figure 10: Core consumes her lover.

As things become more clear we find Core straddling the man running her hands up and down his torso, brushing her lips across his neck and collar bone. She aggressively pins him down running her tongue across his torso and fingers before finally burying her face in his neck. Her face is obscured so what is happening exactly is unclear, but it is easy enough to presume from his screams of agony she has sunk her teeth into his neck. Blood trickles from both his nostrils – he makes no effort to struggle or attempt any action resembling self-defense or self-preservation. This is a crucial point since the aggression and force the man used to rip the boards from the doorway is not present here. She bites his face, animally pawing at the wounds she has inflicted. There are primal, incoherent screams from both.

Core has inflicted severe trauma on her lover. Soaked in his own blood, gurgling his final breaths, he has given himself over to this bestial consummation/consumption. What is striking here are Core's actions; we do not see an impulse for the destruction of his individuality or for the destruction of his uniqueness, the violence is not immured in senselessness, it is not a means without an end or an end that has no means, nor is it sadism in its purest sense – the violence has a reciprocal quality and it is marked by an affection and passion for the other. In this scene, circumscribed by violence, the blood of the victim re-signifies the “oceanic feeling” of the film's opening sequence when a kiss was submerged in darkness, but now it is blood and not water that marks the persistence of contact between bodies.

3. Shane enters Leo's house and finds Core walking down the stairs drenched in blood. At first she does not see him, there is a cut to Leo on his motorcycle, then a cut back to the house where Shane and Core are locked in a passionate embrace. It seems at first this might be a shared embrace between two people who once cared deeply for each other and for whatever reasons have been kept apart. But it soon becomes clear the embrace, at least on the part of Core, is not one of a recognition of identity or of an acknowledgement of the other's subjectivity. It is pure, primordial sexual desire that seeks to consume not only the desire of the other, but the very body to which that desire belongs; it is libidinal consumption, literally, at both phenomenal and corporeal levels. Shane is left with no choice but to defend himself and strangle Core to death (more than her previous lover/victim attempted). As Shane walks out of the home Core, in reference to vampire mythology, spontaneously bursts into flames setting the entire home on fire. Leo walks in to find things as such.

In the following scene, Shane is again in bed with his wife, naked, they caress each other, again Denis' tight shots make the entangled bodies indistinguishable from each other: two bodies, each individuality is immersed and entwined in the other. As the foreplay becomes more intense, Gallo appears to become more aggressive. Sensing this, he leaves the bed and retreats to the bathroom and locks himself in where we see him, back turned to the camera, masturbating. His wife stands outside the washroom with her head leaned against the door listening to Shane as he climaxes. She erupts in anger slapping the door. Shane leaves the hotel room, his wife left running her hand through a pool of his semen on the marble counter top.

After a ride on the metro and a walk through the city, Shane finds the custodian for his room, a woman with whom he has shared occasional impassioned looks throughout the film, in the basement of the hotel by her locker (where the custodians change for work). Having already shown signs of being enamored with Shane, she does not resist when he makes an advance on her, but things become aggressive quickly and after a sharp edit (again, the real violence is absent), all we are left with is a shot of her bloody, lifeless torso being pulled behind a wall, presumably by Shane dragging it away. This scene reveals, in the last analysis, the film's central motif: though Shane tried to quell and satiate his amplified primal desires through auto-eroticism, ultimately, his need for a type of sexual satisfaction located exclusively in the body of the other can not be subdued, and rather than unleash this violence upon his wife, he surrenders to this murderous impulse for pleasure located in the other with the maid. His desires satisfied, Shane returns to the hotel and showers all traces of the murder and sex from his body. In the final scene, Shane embraces his wife and tells her he wants to go home.

In response to its inflamed critical reception, Denis has emphasized that her film mobilizes sensuous fantasies through the influence of horror films. It is worth recalling that Bruno Dumont has also explicitly cited the American horror film as a source of influence for his film *Twenty-nine Palms*, another film in which relationality is foundational to the formation of its images and ideas. As Beugnet says of *Trouble Every Day*, "Ultimately, the horror in *Trouble Every Day*, as in other films of [post-Wall European art cinema] that use graphic violence, is like the horror that fills the media every day and soils our present and past history; it is the unbearable that cannot be wished away." When we consider the violence in post-Wall European art cinema in the context of relationality we can begin to think horror in cinema anew, as the very ontology

of horror emerges through the face-to-face encounter with the other. Against this background, the violence in *Trouble Every Day* is done an interpretive disservice by simply calling it “extreme” or “excessive” when Denis’ film in fact carefully and strategically uses violence to express an irresolvable desire to enter into relation with the other.

I would go further than Beugnet in saying that not only does the violence distinguishing the continental horror film from its modern American predecessor soil us, it is in fact the ineradicable stain of our collective primordial past that need only contingently reveal itself to give evidence of our fundamentally violent nature. Denis’ film accomplishes this through the characters of Core and Shane by depicting their violent compulsions as sexually primal desires satiated only in the destruction/consumption of the other. In this respect, relationality as an area of phenomenological inquiry is arguably better suited than cognitive theory in attending to films in which the feeling of horror *proper* is at issue. Where cognitive theoretical accounts of second phase horror films offer hypotheses around empathetic responses to frightening scenes and the formal techniques used to elicit participatory reactions with the film, a phenomenological account of third phase horror films addresses how the substance of violence changes when bodies in contact are made to mutually recognize the other’s sentience, and, most importantly, what occurs in the course of the destruction of that sentience (central to the concerns of continental philosophy noted in chapter 4).

The genealogy of the serial killer as a type of person from the second phase horror film to the third phase horror film illustrates this shift in violence and relationality. A particularly disturbing scene from Jonathan Demme’s 1991 film *Silence of the Lambs* makes the point.¹⁶³ A serial killer named Buffalo Bill has kidnapped his latest victim and is holding her captive at the bottom of a dry well in the basement of his home. Bill has a penchant for removing the skin of his victims in order to make articles of clothing, and so takes great interest in caring for his victim’s skin before it is removed. He lowers a bottle of lotion in a bucket down the well and bluntly says to his captive, “It rubs the lotion on its skin, it does this whenever it’s told.” The half naked and shivering woman pleads with Bill to let her go and that her family will pay cash for her return, to which he rejoins, “It rubs the lotion on its skin or it gets the hose again.” After the woman has rubbed the lotion on her skin, Bill lowers a bucket with a mechanic’s light attached to it down the well a second time and says, “Now, it places the lotion in the basket.” The woman begins crying and pleading incessantly that she wishes to go home and wants to see her mother, the light from the bucket clearly illuminating her desperate expressions. She cries out repeatedly, “Please! Please! I want to see my mommy!” Bill appears to be fighting back tears, as he calmly repeats, “It puts the lotion in the basket.” The woman’s cries grow more guttural and desperate as Bill now begins to cry before finally yelling out, “Put the fucking lotion in the basket!”

We can recall here the arguments made in chapter 2 regarding the rise of the serial killer as a type of person and his sociopathic tendencies, which allows him to render his victims as objects in pursuit of his egocentric desires. We see this in the characters of Henry and Otis in *Henry Portrait of a Serial Killer*, in Raymond’s actions in *Spoorloos*, and in Benny’s actions (and subsequently, his father’s actions) in *Benny’s Video*. In these films the killers are utterly detached from their victims as they are seen as nothing more than objects to be used or mediums through which experience can be gained. The bodies

of victims are rendered utterly non-relational insofar as they are desubjectivized and treated as expendable objects. In this scene with Buffalo Bill, a different relation between killer and victim is presented. Bill does not address the woman by name or by a pronoun that would confer upon her either identity or subjecthood, she is instead referred to by the object-neutral “it.” But the victim refuses to be desubjectivized and relentlessly makes her emotional appeals to Bill, forcing him to confront her sentience, individuality, and subjectivity. For a moment, Bill is made to enter into a relational encounter with his victim.¹⁶⁴

The serial killer as a type of person in the continental horror film is defined by such relational encounters. Killers are frequently forced to recognize that the other is a subject and their encounter reveals that mutual dependency is an ontological condition. As we will see in the following chapter, violence and the encounter between killer and victim is radically altered when the killer encounters an other who cannot, or will not, be desubjectivized.

Chapter 6

Opening the Body's Night: The Cinema of Phillipe Grandrieux

I. The Horror of the Night: Emmanuel Levinas' *There is*

In the opening sequence to Phillipe Grandrieux's *Sombre* (1998) we are presented with a theater full of children clutching each other and screaming intermittently while looking off-screen toward what is presumably a stage. The theater is dark and Grandrieux's camera claustrophobically frames the children in tight shots. A little boy yells at the stage, "Thump him! Thump him!" while another girl screams, "Behind you!" Grandrieux's camera cuts between images of children screaming as the frame tremors and vibrates as if to signify the transmission of affect between them on some shared metaphysical frequency. When screams erupt among the children they all invariably turn away from the stage to face one another and share their cries of fear/glee. These screams form an affective network between the children, as their emotions are amplified through an inter-relational, affective participation between one another.

Grandrieux rejects the use of establishing shots and reverse-shots to orient the participant to the space of the dark theater and its young audience members. Instead, the director, through the use tight two-shots and close-ups, eschews the functions of analytic editing, electing instead to render diegetic space through an affective network of screams and shared looks; the children's responses evince the possibility of affective positivity in relation to aesthetic negativity.¹⁶⁵ In this scene two crucial aspects of the continental horror film and its relation to phenomenology are rendered succinctly: the importance of relationality (the shared looks between the children as frightening things occur off-screen, and the necessity of the other in this collective experience) and the feeling of absence (Like Athena's shield in the hands of Perseus, the frightening spectacle is available to us as a reflection and we can only experience it as absence).

Phenomenological approaches to the study of cinema tend to work in one of two modalities: a Husserlian approach or an approach based upon the work of Merleau-Ponty. While phenomenology attends to appearances and the body, in the case of horror it may also attend to non-appearance, or absence. Emmanuel Levinas' philosophy is explicitly concerned with this relation between horror and absence and a Levinasian framework emphasizing this relation should serve as the ground for new philosophical inquiries on the horror film. This is the aim of the present chapter. Many philosophers and aestheticians dating back to Burke, Kant, Hume and Schiller have each sought to explain the phenomenon of the sublime in art, with Hume's "Of Tragedy" and Schiller's "On the Reason why we take pleasure in tragic subjects" concerned with the seeming paradox of negative pleasure in certain stage dramas. In the context of cinema, some critics have rejected conclusions drawn by these and other similarly minded thinkers on the grounds that eighteenth century analyses hail to us from pre-cinematic times and therefore do not take medium specificity into account.¹⁶⁶ While it is important that scholars consider medium specificity when thinking about the feelings films inspire, preemptively rejecting insights on cinematic feelings from thinkers (who have made significant contributions to our collective understanding of these feelings, in general) on the grounds that their

thinking hails to us from pre-cinematic times seem counterproductive. I argue that it is precisely because continental philosophy has not been applied to cinema that the horror genre has perpetually misnamed the feelings its films inspire. It is also one of the reasons why critics have found themselves concerned with paradoxes of pleasurable fear in horror films. Levinas is not a theorist or philosopher of cinema, but his philosophical insights on horror is invaluable to a phenomenological reconsideration of the horror film.

But first, how has Levinas' overarching philosophical project critiqued Heidegger's ontology? Levinas believed that a thorough critique of Heidegger is necessary to understanding how ontology relates to the crisis of contemporary civilization at the middle point of the 20th century. One of the crucial ways in which Levinas grounds his critique of Heidegger is to contrast his concept of the *There is* with Heidegger's philosophy of being. As Levinas scholar Adriaan Peperzak points out, "Levinas understands Heidegger's attempt to think Being in the light of the expression *es gibt* (the normal German equivalent of the English 'there is' or the French 'il y a') as the celebration of a profound generosity by which Being would bestow light, freedom, truth, and splendor to all beings." For Levinas, the *There is* is not defined by generosity, and he argues it should instead be characterized as an indeterminate, shapeless, colorless, chaotic, and dangerous rumbling and rustling. "The confrontation with its anonymous forces," Peperzak writes, "generates neither light nor freedom, but rather terror as a loss of selfhood. Immersion in the lawless chaos of *There is* would be equivalent to the absorption by a depersonalizing realm of pure materiality."¹⁶⁷ Levinas conceives being as something that does not radiate light. Instead, Levinas is interested in what the absence of light (the darkness of the night) reveals about the ontology of Being.

It bears repeating – as I have argued throughout this dissertation – that the feeling of horror *proper* has long been misunderstood in the popular imaginary. What is understood as horror in the "horror" genre has very little to do with how horror has been defined and described in the critical literature on the Gothic novel, in the cultural theory attending to contemporary violence, and especially in twentieth century philosophy. In the context of a feeling-based critique that privileges a phenomenological approach, as a provisional orientation to thinking about horror at the intersections of phenomenology and existentialism, and as a feeling not necessarily the product of violence, I want to examine in detail ideas concerning horror *proper* that lay at the bedrock of Levinas' philosophy. In lieu of a comprehensive overview of Levinas' understanding of horror and its departure from the dominant hypotheses on negation in continental philosophy, I will instead draw upon some essential details in Levinas' philosophical formulation of *night* as it relates to his notion of *There is (Il y a)*. *Night* and the *There is* are two of the central ideas concerning horror that thread through the whole of his philosophy. I will offer a reading of French artist and filmmaker Phillipe Grandrieux's films *Sombre* (1998) and *La vie nouvelle* (2003) using Levinas' concepts of the *There is* and the *night* to explore the relation between one of continental philosophy's emblematic accounts of horror as it bears upon the work of a key artistic filmmaker from the post-Wall period.

It is also worth noting that Grandrieux emerged as a feature filmmaker during post-Wall art cinema's most fertile years between 1997 – 2004, which saw the release of seminal films from directors such as Gaspar Noé (*I Stand Alone*, 1998; *Irreversible*, 2003), Cathrine Breillat (*Romance*, 1999; *Fat Girl*, 2001; *Anatomy of Hell*, 2004), Bruno Dumont (*Humanité*, 1999; *Twentynine Palms*, 2003), and Michael Haneke (*Funny*

Games, 1997; *Code Unknown*, 2000; *Time of the Wolf*, 2003). In each of these films and in the larger corpus of post-Wall European art cinema, violence is characterized by one or more of the four motifs identified in Sluizer's *Spoorloos* in chapter 1: negative curiosity, contingency, the stranger, and the banality of evil. But, as I have argued in the preceding chapters, the feeling of absence may be the strongest catalyst for inspiring horror. Of all the continental horror directors, Grandrieux's cinema most emphatically expresses the feeling of horror in the absence that night brings, while also drawing the four motifs of the horror film's third phase into taut relation.

Levinas develops a philosophy of horror that is composed in the juxtapositions between light and its luminosity, a means by which the world and being is revealed to us, and "night" in which things, beings and objects are submerged, concealed, and dissolved, yet whose existence in spite of their concealment and dissolution continue to impose themselves in their absence. This is what Levinas calls *There is* (*Il y a*). In his book *Levinas Unhinged*, Tom Sparrow notes that "night" is an important concept in Levinasian phenomenology as he draws an ontological distinction between the night of the *There is* and the phenomenal night which opposes daylight. Sparrow argues that for Levinas a philosophy of the night recognizes that form disintegrates in the darkness, and that in this darkness objects lose their graspability. In the darkness of the night the naked materiality of existence encroaches upon the meaning that light reveals.¹⁶⁸

Levinas explains that the *There is* designates an impersonal form, as in the statement, "it is windy," or, "it is cold." He insists that its anonymity is essential to it. For Levinas the *There is* marks a universal absence that is, in its turn, an absolutely unavoidable presence. "What we call the I," he writes, "is itself submerged by the night, invaded, depersonalized, stifled by it. The disappearance of all things and of the I leaves what cannot disappear, the sheer fact of being in which one participates, whether one wants to or not... Being remains, like a field of forces, like a heavy atmosphere belonging to no one."¹⁶⁹ It is this being submerged into night, into a vacant anonymity in which all things have disappeared that ontologically imposes the indivisible remainder of *something*: of the presence of absence. The *There is* is said to penetrate behind the form which light reveals into the substance that constitutes the dark background of existence. Levinas explicitly names this phenomenon "horror" when he states, "The rustling of the *Il y a*... is horror... it insinuates itself in the night, as an undetermined menace of space itself disengaged from its function as a receptacle for objects." For Levinas the phenomenon of horror is fundamentally a phenomenon in which space is not only evacuated of any and all materiality that might lend it definition, but the very ontology of space is radicalized and is, in a sense, othered from itself.

Horror in this sense negates the features of Euclidean space by rendering its physical dimensions irrelevant; horror eliminates the geo-physical by drawing out an *a priori* anonymity where only the pulse of a void remains. One encounters this feeling of an undetermined menace of space in the scene from *Benny's Video* described in chapter 3 when the family returns to their apartment after Benny and his mother have come back from their trip to Egypt while Benny's father was dismembering the corpse of a young girl. In every frame there is a certain "pulse of existence" emanating from the domestic space of Benny's home upon his return from Egypt; the static framing of each room, the immobility of the camera, the stillness of the space itself, the strange vitality of the surrounding objects in the rooms that have stood witness to the brutality of the girl's

destruction. But, unlike Benny's video camera, these objects are without the facility to record and testify to the horrors they have seen. They remain in the space as mute witnesses to a violence that takes shape in our imaginations. It is the muteness of these spaces that rumbles in the silence of the image, what Levinas might describe as "the return of presence in negation...the limit between being and nothingness where being insinuates itself even in nothingness."

Levinas also makes clear that anonymity – that is, its detachment from any subjectivity – is fundamental to the *There is*. He writes, "to be conscious is to be torn away from the *Il y a*, since the existence of a consciousness constitutes a subjectivity, a subject of existence that is, to some extent, a master of being, already a name in the anonymity of the night." Horror is described as a feeling that strips consciousness of its very subjectivity by turning the subjectivity of the subject inside out. This is a sense of feeling presence where there should be absence and absence alone. This event of being which returns in the heart of negation occurs when we see the image of Raymond seated comfortably on the burial ground of Rex and Saskia in *Spoorloos*, it occurs again in *Benny's Video* as I have described above, and it occurs when the blast-light over Hiroshima sears the postures of the incinerated victims against walls leaving only macabre "shadows" where flesh and blood beings once stood. This is the very definition of the shadow of being, of a presence turned absence and uncannily made present again in the heart of the very absence opened by its own negation. As Levinas tells us, "This presence which arises behind nothingness is neither a being nor consciousness functioning in a void, but the universal fact of the *There is*, which encompasses things and consciousness...It is the very return of presence into the void left by absence – not the return of *something*, but of a presence; it is the reawakening of the *Il y a* in the heart of negation."¹⁷⁰ Horror, then, is feeling absence.¹⁷¹

The following quote from Levinas is essential to a full comprehension of what the feeling of horror entails. For this reason it is necessary to quote at length:

Darkness, as the presence of absence, is not a purely present content. There is not a 'something' that remains. There is the atmosphere of presence, which can, to be sure, appear later as a content, but originally is the impersonal, nonsubstantive event of the night and the *Il y a*. It is like a density of the void, like a murmur of silence. There is nothing, but there is being, like a field of forces. Darkness is the very play of existence which would play itself out even if there were nothing. It is to express just this paradoxical existence that we have introduced the term '*Il y a*.' We want to call attention to this being a density, an atmosphere, a field, which is not to be identified with an object that would have this density, or that would be taken up in the breath of existence or situated within a field of forces. We want to call attention to the existential density of the void itself, devoid of all being...where negation, annihilation, and nothingness are events like affirmation, creation and subsistence, but impersonal events. A presence of absence, the *Il y a* is beyond contradiction; it embraces

and dominates its contradictory... One is detached from any object, any content, yet there is presence.

I wish to link Levinas' conception of horror to Phillippe Grandrieux's films, and to explore the possibilities of conceiving the feeling of horror outside the explicit parameters of monstrosity and the supernatural that have continued to shape our collective understanding of horror for almost a century. Against the background of Levinasian philosophy, it will become more clear how post-Wall European art cinema precipitates the third phase of the horror film – what I have been calling the continental horror film – in its radical departure from the horizons of revenge, pathology, and the supernatural that have come to define the modern period of the American horror film. Part of the tacit promise of the continental horror film is to not only reconceive the experience of screening violence, but to visualize horror as something that transcends violence itself; violence that is not reducible to merely an act, but an experience that is rooted more deeply in the human condition.

II. *Sombre* and *La vie nouvelle*

Levinas uses insomnia as a metaphor for his conception of the night, to alter night from the status of a concrete modality to a metaphysical concept. It is the insomniac who is said to experience the night as negation, and thus the insomniac is the one who must confront the horrifying absence of form in the dark. The insomniac is addressed by the anonymity of the night, by an anonymous field of forces, and is kept awake by an atmosphere of “something.” In their monograph on the thought of Maurice Blanchot (who was deeply influenced by Levinas' philosophy), Ulrich Haas and William Large describe the experience of the insomniac lying in bed, immersed in darkness: “It seems like the things themselves in the room, the table you sit at during the day, and the wardrobe in which you place your clothes, are decomposing into the night so that it appears as though it is this night that is looking back at you, and no longer your treasured possessions. Still worse, however... is that you yourself seem to be dissolving into this all-enveloping night.”¹⁷²

Whereas terror is the physical proximity of a threat, an event in which the physical exteriority of objects and beings in space are threatening, horror dissolves the objects, beings and space itself into an anonymous, residual presence that now confronts the insomniac with their absence. More alarmingly though, along with the objects and space of the room the subject, too, is said to experience itself dissolving into the anonymity of the night and, in turn, is left to confront his/her own absence.¹⁷³ Thus, like Freud's *unheimlich*, the feeling of horror emerges when the familiarity of physical objects and surrounding space take on an unfamiliar character. Though not citing Levinas directly, in his novel *Thomas the Obscur*, Blanchot seems to offer the testimony of a Levinasian insomniac in the following passage:

I discover my being in the vertiginous abyss where it is not, an absence, an absence where it sets itself like a god, I am not and I endure. An inexorable future stretches forth infinitely for this suppressed being. ...Here is the night. The darkness hides nothing. My first perception is that this

night is not a provisional absence of light. Far from being a possible locus of images, it is composed of all that which is not seen and is not heard, and, listening to it, even a man would know that, if he were not a man, he would hear nothing. In true night, then, the unheard, the invisible are lacking, all those things that make the night habitable. It does not allow anything other than itself to be attributed to it; it is impenetrable.¹⁷⁴

The poet Robert Frost in his 1922 poem, “Acquainted with the Night” offers a description of insomnia that chimes readily with Blanchot’s description of the night and the figure of the insomniac, the being who dissolves into an all-enveloping night, used by Levinas to advance his conception of the *There is*.¹⁷⁵ In Frost’s stanzas the phenomenal night, which opposes daylight, and the night of the *There is* in which the naked materiality of existence encroaches upon the meaning that light reveals come into contact. In this reflection, the night is an anonymous atmosphere in which the insomniac finds himself, but it is also substantialized as a thing with which one can become “acquainted.” In the third-to-last and penultimate stanzas the insomniac describes a distant cry in the dark, a cry from an absent source that interrupts the obtruding sound of his own feet, a cry that is, in turn, interrupted. The insomniac says that the cry is one that neither beckons him nor addresses him directly (it is anonymous). Who is this person crying out, if it is a person at all? Why has the cry been interrupted? If it is not a person calling him back or saying good-bye, is it the night itself as an autonomous entity addressing the insomniac in spite of the insomniac’s insistence that he and the night are now acquainted? Time cannot anchor him to his subjectivity, communication is deemed purposeless, the night confronts him. In this sense, he who is acquainted with the night is naturally acquainted with horror.

In the sonnet “Carrion Comfort,” Gerard Manley Hopkins conveys the inner turmoil of “That night, that year/Of now done darkness I wretch lay wrestling with (my God!) my God.” In the sonnet’s opening lines Hopkins writes,

NOT, I’ll not, carrion comfort, Despair, not feast on thee;
Not untwist – slack they may be – these last strands of man
In me ór, most weary, cry *I can no more*. I can;
Can something, hope, wish day come, not choose not to be.¹⁷⁶

As Shakespeare’s Hamlet, too, pondered the substance of his being, Hopkins feels absence and recoils before an imagined “not to be.” This wishing away of the night and the hope that day might come and illuminate what has been submerged in the night suggests that once the night has been dissipated by breaking dawn, the feeling of absence, of horror, brought on by the anonymity of the night too will dissipate; but this may not be the case.

Once we are acquainted with the night, to see how our being is then exhibited to us in the light of day may not mean it will be bereft of the horrors of the night we have confronted. Sparrow offers the compelling observation that, “Maybe it is this ‘insecurity’ in the face of existence that Elie Weisel had in mind when he gave the title *Night* to his recollection of the Holocaust.” Sparrow believes that Weisel’s work encapsulates the conceptual dimension of Levinas’ point that daylight is not exempt from the horror of the night, as evidenced in many of Weisel’s recollections from his book; for example: “We received no food. We lived on snow; it took the place of bread. The days resembled the

nights, and the nights left in our souls the dregs of their darkness. The train rolled slowly, often halted for a few hours, and continued. It never stopped snowing. We remained lying on the floor for days and nights, one on top of the other, never uttering a word. We were nothing but frozen bodies. Our eyes closed, we merely waited for the next stop, to unload our dead.”¹⁷⁷ We also see such images in the light of day in Alain Resnais’ recollection of the Holocaust in his aptly titled *Night and Fog* (1955).

In the film’s opening sequence, Resnais’ camera passes over the empty fields enclosed by barbed wire fences that were once used for Nazi concentration camps. Many of the atrocities are viewed not under the cloak of darkness, they are, rather, exposed to the light of day. The narrator explains that these fields were a macabre terrain of human annihilation, yet the scene (shot in color) shows the early morning sunlight beaming down on green, lush fields. These opening scenes of green fields and dilapidated wire fences illuminated in early morning sunlight are the very antithesis of the images the film’s title would seem to evoke. The sense of absence expressed in the tracking shots across the fields once populated by scores of victims the Nazis called “Figuren” (dolls, wood, merchandise; objectifying terms used to assuage the killers of the moral burden of their task), conveyed not through “night and fog,” but in the bright, beaming sunlight of late-dawn. Thus, what Resnais makes clear in these opening scenes is that when one wishes away the night with the hope that day might come and eradicate the horror and anonymity of the night, what the day brings with it, what it illuminates, in an astonishing turn, is now the absence of the night; a new horror, a new absence, at one remove from the horror of the now dissipated darkness.

In a similar sense, Grandrieux’s cinema juxtaposes light and darkness to convey feelings of horror through absence. His work has been linked to the French sensationalist cinema of the post-Wall period variously called “cinema of evil,” “cinema of transgression,” “cinema of terror,” “cinema of the abject,” and of course, “the new extremism.” In *Phenomenology and the Future of Film*, Jenny Chamarette notes that in this cinema, by whatever name it is assigned, “corporeal forms are no longer identifiable as human forms, they are instead subject to the flows of erotic desire and destructive drives that particularly characterize body genres such as horror.”¹⁷⁸ But Chamarette argues that Grandrieux’s cinema represents a difficult example of this type of cinema, for despite shared characteristics with this loosely described “cinema of evil,” or new extremism, Grandrieux’s films are unique in their treatment of violence, sexuality, fear, and, I would add, most crucially, relationality.

Jean, the protagonist of *Sombre*, is a puppeteer travelling through rural France, staging puppet shows for children in nondescript venues. In-between his puppet shows, Jean enters into sexual encounters with women whom he eventually strangles. Jean is a serial killer and in the course of his travels he eventually comes across Claire and her sister Christine after their car breaks down on the side of the road. Claire is put-off by Jean, but Christine begins flirting with him and it is not long before Jean attacks her. Claire saves her sister and puts her on a train for Paris, but, almost inexplicably, Claire stays behind with Jean and attempts to save him from himself. Jean seems to reject Claire’s unspoken concern, but he neither drives her away nor kills her as he attempts to bridle his impulses.

Tim Palmer has called *Sombre* a “serial killer road movie,” a view that generally accords with the film’s reception at the time of its release. Many of the film’s critics have

commented at length about its violence, deriding it as yet another example of an “extreme” European art film that elects to convey story and narrative through a blood-tinted lens. To call *Sombre* a serial killer road movie is not a misdescription, but it privileges bone over flesh; it defines the work by its objective structure at the expense of its texture; the shapes and contours and colors that give the work the form we first sensually encounter. This is the critical optic cum x-ray, an approach to cinema that renders the surface transparent and peers into the film-object while eliding its phenomenal features.

Sombre may ostensibly be a serial killer road movie, but not in the tradition of Oliver Stone’s *Natural Born Killers* (1994) or Terence Malick’s *Badlands* (1973). Jean, like Col. Kurtz in *Apocalypse Now*, is more of a figure at the heart of darkness; like the poet Hopkins he is a man wrestling with his humanity, and it is this fact that defines Jean more than his status as a serial killer roaming the French countryside. Grandrieux seems less concerned with probing the psychology of Jean or revealing him to be an opaque shadow or some kind of visible, human consciousness, than a “terrifying incarnation of the non-human, a shadow of being, clothed almost successfully in what we might understand to be a narratively illuminated, psychologically transparent form.”¹⁷⁹ One might read Jean as a metonym for the wolf from the *Little Red Riding Hood* fairytale he puppeteers; like the wolf clothed in the garments of the grandmother after killing her, the wolf tries to pass as human so that its true form is concealed and the bloodshed can be perpetuated.

Grandrieux’s oblique narrative design examines Jean’s ‘heart of darkness’ neither through psychological motivation, nor through the structure of violence and its commission. Grandrieux instead brings the interiority of Jean to the surface of the image. In other words, matters that are typically worked out through plot and narration are addressed at the level of the visual and the sonic. As Grandrieux rhetorically asks,

What do we try to reach so feverishly, with such obstinacy and suffering, through representation, through images, if not to open the body’s night, its opaque mass, the flesh with which we think – and present it to the light, to our faces, the enigma of our lives.¹⁸⁰

Citing the cinema of Andrei Tarkovsky, Grandrieux observes that in Tarkovsky’s *Mirror* (1975), “you see how an image isn’t just created but is linked to a history of representations, a history of forms, of images, of icons, but we can see how the image is propped up by another field, that of thought, of the Logos. In this sense, filmmakers are not necessarily philosophers but the cinema pays a lot of attention to what philosophers are doing.”¹⁸¹ If we take Grandrieux at his word, we must necessarily situate his filmmaking in the context of continental philosophy. It is not enough to point out that Grandrieux’s films are linked to traditions of experimental cinema in the vein of Stan Brackage, Peggy Ahwesh, and Michael Snow, the images constituting his films must also be situated against the horizon of the problems of continental philosophy clearly evident in his work.

For example, Martine Beugenet describes Grandrieux’s cinema as an “aesthetics of chaos” and suggests that it willfully explores the intolerable aspects of the human condition in the arenas of violence and madness, war and displacement, exclusion, exploitation and dehumanization. She describes the *mise en scene* in his films as undergoing a kind of physical annihilation in which the subject position of his character’s

bodies are subverted, thus rendering form dematerialized. Beugenet contends that this dematerialization of bodies opens a hole in the concrete matter of the image, “as if the human form belonged to a different plane of appearance or molecular speed than its surroundings.” This so-called “aesthetics of chaos” is said to capture bodies dissolving in the visual logic of Grandrieux’s blurred, vibrating images, distorted frame-rates, and darkly-lit *mise en scenes*. As the body recedes into the darkness of the image, all that was once inanimate around the body is said to “achieve a concrete and inexorable presence.” The conditions of this so-called “aesthetics of chaos” bears striking resemblance to the conditions Levinas’s insomniac experiences as described above. To refer to these images as an “aesthetics of chaos” only further obscures an experience that continental philosophy has long already described as *horror*.¹⁸²

Grandrieux’s desire to “open the body’s night” can be seen to be an explicitly philosophical conceit, further emphasizing the point that a philosophy of horror must necessarily take continental philosophy into account. From Grandrieux’s rumination on the nature of images it would seem he seeks to penetrate the impenetrable. To look into the body’s night suggests the discovery of a presence of being within one’s self where one feels being is absent. If this absence marks the essence of being dissolved in the night, then it would not be unreasonable to suggest that what Grandrieux’s cinema strives to accomplish is to “present to the light” this absence, or to express it in philosophical terms, to bring Levinas’ “night” into Heidegger’s “light” – to make this absence felt. In the opening scene of *Sombre* a car winds its way along a mountainside road as the camera follows behind in a long shot. The image is dark and at first it seems this scene is taking place at night, but as the car makes a sharp turn the sun appears to be at its midday point, though it looks like a blotch of light in the sky, hazy and obscured by wisps of clouds. The scene gives the impression that the sun is struggling to illuminate the landscape, as if something more than just clouds was dimming its illuminative power. There are several cuts in this opening scene and each time the hazy, cloud-obscured sun remains in the center of the frame, yet the landscape and everything in the frame appears to be in near total darkness. Thus, from the film’s very first scene Grandrieux announces the tension between light and darkness, between daytime and the night, around which the entire film is formed.



Figure 11: Jean driving through sunlit darkness.

Soon after we see Jean with a naked woman in a room. It is impossible to make out any details about this room or what Jean is doing with her as the image is almost completely without illumination. At times an unknown light source will catch the flesh of the woman's naked body, giving the viewer a vague sense of what is happening in the scene. Jean barks out several orders in succession: "Spread your legs... Wider... Turn around." It appears that Jean is still fully-clothed as he seems to be staring at the woman's genitals. Moments later Jean takes hold of the woman and begins strangling her. As the camera closes in on what little of this strangulation is visible, the image becomes blurry. The blurred image of Jean strangling the woman transitions into a blurred image of a blindfolded boy walking in slow motion through a grassy field. Through several jump-cuts we see the boy moving cautiously across the grass and into a wooded area where he stumbles across the body of the woman Jean killed in the previous scene. While the image is among the brightest in the entire film the boy's body is blurred and decentered in a series of close-ups. Even when the image is illuminated enough that we should be able to see things clearly, Grandrieux seems to be suggesting the light does not always render the world visible, that light can get in our eyes and impede our vision. This moment in the film recalls Bataille's claim that the three things we cannot see are the sun, coitus and cadavers: the boy in the field would seem to be shielded from this dilemma of being blinded by light as he moves about blindfolded, yet, in this situation where light is occluded from his vision, he still manages to stumble upon the corpse of Jean's naked victim, though he cannot see her. Thus, even in the light of day Grandrieux makes it clear that one can still be submerged in darkness, and one can still experience the horror of the night.¹⁸³



Figure 12: A blindfolded boy feels his way through the "darkness" as we look on through Grandrieux's blurred lens, seemingly blinded by the daylight.

Darkness permeates the entire film. Between scenes of Jean driving to new locations and scenes of Jean in rooms alone, it is not so much that the image is dark – that there is not enough light to illuminate the image – it is more the case that darkness is *present*. Darkness in these scenes becomes positivity; it becomes the substance of the image, a thickness in which Jean finds himself submerged. As Kaja Silverman points out, “Not all affects connect us to the world. Some – like horror – do the opposite; they provide the means through which we distance ourselves from it.”¹⁸⁴ Regardless of where Jean goes or the time of day, he seems to be perpetually enveloped by the night, as if his own “heart of darkness” were opened to become the very source light of the image.

In just this sense one can see how the visual logic of Grandrieux’s film conceives the “opening of the body’s night.” It is as if Jean is walking and driving around in an endlessly crepuscular state, as if the night of his inner nature, as Hegel puts it, has escaped his body and surrounded him to his own astonishment. Early in the film we see Jean walking amongst people on a crowded street that is presumably being used as one of the checkpoints for the Tour de France. The sound of a helicopter overhead is amplified and omnipresent. Jean looks to the sky but the helicopter never appears in the frame. Jean’s eyes scan the surrounding space in what seems to be a slightly dazed, slightly confused state, as if there were no helicopter in the sky and the sound was emanating from the sky itself. I cannot help but recall here Levinas’ incisive remark that, “Evildoers are disturbing to themselves like phantoms.”



Figure 13: Night or day?



Figure 14: Jean lost in darkness.

There is a clear impression that the phenomenal darkness of the scene is on the one hand Jean's own subjective perspective on the world, yet at the same time this darkness imposes itself all around him as if it were its own force detached from his consciousness. This opening of the body's night is not darkness expelled from Jean's body and recoded – or metaphorized – as his subjectivity; it is, rather, its own intensity,

or at least perceived as such. The darkness inexplicably becomes substantive and anonymous. It becomes a field of forces, an absence made presence.

Jean meets his next victim in a private peepshow where he sits in almost complete darkness as a woman enters a brightly lit partitioned room. One of the walls has a glass insert that separates Jean from the woman. She disrobes and fondles herself as Jean looks on motionless and in silence. Always the performer, but now the spectator, Jean watches the woman's seductive performance until the woman places her hands on the glass as if to shield away the light in her room and peer into the darkness, or to entice the stranger in the darkness to approach the partition and "touch" her. In the next scene we find Jean and the woman driving at night along a dark highway toward the woman's mobile home. The scene cuts to Jean and the woman inside the mobile home where there is little illumination aside from faint touches of moonlight. As if the darkness in the room was not sufficient, Jean blindfolds the woman, whom we can now see is naked, and pushes her back on her elbows against the bed. Jean spreads her legs and then spreads her genitals and gazes at it momentarily. Jean wraps his arms around the woman in an embrace and rests his forehead against her chest as if to offer her a silent, preemptive apology for what will happen next. Jean then seizes the woman by the neck and strangles the life from her.



Figure 15: Jean gazes into the genitals of a blindfolded woman.

These scenes problematize the status of the victim as an object for the serial killer's sociopathic desires by foregrounding the obstinate presence of the fleshy body and that body's ethical appeal in its face-to-face appearance with Jean. Earlier I described a troubled moment in *Silence of the Lambs* for the serial killer Buffalo Bill who began slipping into an intersubjective encounter with one of his victims after instructing her to rub lotion on her skin. In spite of his trying to maintain objective distance from his victim as other serial killers of the modern American horror film and early continental horror films like *Spoorloos* and *Benny's Video* were so proficient in doing, Buffalo Bill could

not fully seal himself off from being confronted by the victim's subjectivity. Grandrieux's *Sombre* seems to push this dilemma to its radical conclusion.

In her effort to read subjectivity in Grandrieux's films, Chamarette understands the metaphor of the "body's night" as a struggle to shed light upon the opacity of the non-apprehended body. Chamarette states that her approach to Grandrieux's cinema is to think *with* the paradoxical illuminations of his "technically, aesthetically, and ethically very dark films, and how the continual dissolution of the concrete and the abstract, the visible and the invisible, the physical and the metaphysical, can touch upon the possibility of approaching cinematic subjectivity."¹⁸⁵ She observes that in Grandrieux's films, bodies are objects and that things are done to them as the recognition of the autonomy or sentience of these bodies is stubbornly refused.

But, as the opening scenes of *Sombre* illustrate, Grandrieux does not merely depict bodies as objects divested of their autonomy or their sentience. In fact, what I think *Sombre* reveals is that it is the very recognition of the other's autonomy and the startling realization of this recognition that haunts Jean. We might say that *Sombre* is not a serial killer film in the tradition of the modern American horror film, or even in the early moments of the continental phase of the horror film, but rather a radical alternative to the serial killer film: here the figure of the sociopath moves away from seeing the other as an object and is unexpectedly confronted with a primordial need for relationality. In other words, Jean is not the serial killer as sociopath, *he is the serial killer as insomniac*. It is important that we recognize that this turn comes about through bodies in contact. Bodies are constantly touching and being touched in Grandrieux's films, but it would be an error to suggest that these bodies are simply objectified. Grandrieux's films are all about the *consequences* of bodies being objectified, consequences we arrive at through a desire and necessity for relationality, and through bodily contact shared with the other.

Grandrieux's second feature film *La vie nouvelle* (2003), a film obliquely about human trafficking (but really about relationality), repeatedly makes this fact apparent. There are two sequences that stand out in particular. Early on in the film a man and a woman are in an empty room together. The man – a nefarious type – has just purchased the woman from among a line of naked men and women being sold in a vacant warehouse. The woman's face is framed in close-up as she stands in the center of the room. The man approaches her with a razor-sharp knife and begins methodically cutting away her hair. Neither the man nor the woman speaks as handful by handful he draws the blade of the knife down the length of her hair. Occasionally the woman lets out a cry of distress as she glares at the man with muted anger, but eventually he draws closer to her and kisses her, wrapping his arms around her as he continues to cut her hair. This gesture of affection causes the woman to breakdown into tears as she slowly begins acquiescing to the process of her physical (and psychic) transformation. What at first plainly appears to be the explicit objectification of the woman turns out to be a relational encounter.

In the second sequence, the woman – now a prostitute for hire – sees two clients, one after the other, in adjacent hotel rooms. The first client is a young American man who tries to speak with the woman, but she offers little in way of response. He seems enamored with her and tries to affectionately coax her into something more than merely fucking. He traces his hands along her body, taking his time with her as she tries to accelerate the process and bring the episode to an expedient end. The encounter is one in which she is being objectified, but that objectification is elided by his desire for

something more, something that might penetrate, so to speak, the façade of detachment with which she approaches her task. After a brief period of intercourse the woman dresses quickly as the man continues to try to connect with her on a personal level, but she does not respond and leaves the room.

As the woman enters the hallway, a man who appears to be her pimp leads her to the next room. Her second client is a sleepy-eyed Frenchman who is the total antithesis of her previous client. He never once utters a word as he casually beats and strangles the woman while humming a show tune. He stalks around her, stands next to her looking off into the distance as if she were not there, making it known to her that he is in complete control of her and the situation. At one point he literally measures her entire body with the width-span of his palm. But in this moment of apparent objectification, it is important to note that it is his own body he uses to measure her. Rather than a subject/object relation here we are presented with a kind of *pas de deux* of sexual violence. “As opposed to the horror of the abject body, the body as unit of exchange or the body as imminently replaceable, supplantable, and animalistic,” writes Chamarette, “what is presented to us, rather than represented, in *La vie nouvelle*... is a kind of subjectivity that exceeds subjectivity itself.”¹⁸⁶ This subjectivity that exceeds subjectivity, I call *relationality*. On the surface of things it appears that the men in these sequences flatly objectify the woman, but Grandrieux shows that even in the most extreme instances of human objectification – serial killing and human trafficking being two of its purest examples – relationality remains an irreducible feature of these encounters.

In *Sombre*, Jean, the puppeteer, faces a similar predicament, as he is in constant contact with objects that he animates – the puppets he bestows subjectivity upon by giving life to them with his hands. In contradistinction to his occupation, in his leisure time he uses his hands to take life from living bodies whose subjectivity confronts him, turning them to lifeless objects. It is the very fact that he cannot intimately face the flesh and blood being before him why he seems compelled to take their subjecthood from them and make them inanimate like one of his puppets, to thus render animate subjects as inanimate objects. Levinas scholar Adriaan Peperzak says that in Levinas’ philosophy of the other there comes a moment when one recognizes that, “Objects are born when I place things in the perspective of other persons.”¹⁸⁷ As I have argued in earlier chapters, when the serial killer’s sociopathic egocentrism intends toward violence, it is an encounter where the other is not recognized as an other, but is instead reduced to the status of object. We witness this process in the actions of serial killers for whom the other’s destruction forms merely a step in an otherwise egocentric pursuit of desires that eclipse the other’s sentience.

In any of the juggernaut killer films throughout the modern period of the American horror film, or in films like *Spoorloos*, *Benny’s Video* or *Funny Games*, the other is a pawn in the killer’s egocentric conception of the world or an object that can be destroyed and disposed of in the course of achieving a desire. For Levinas, the other’s appearance is an interdiction requiring that the other be accorded a place in the world, that care be accorded to the other for the other has disrupted the egocentrism of the ‘I’ and all that is contained in this sense of being. Grandrieux’s *Sombre* distinguishes itself in this regard, for what Jean struggles with throughout the film is the tension between his egocentric desires and the other’s status as autonomous, sentient being whose very appearance makes an ethical appeal to him. In other words, what Jean struggles with is

the conflict between his death drive impulses and his ontological desire for relationality and recognition of the other therein.

Midway through the film this struggle between relationality and desire plays out in a scene at a lake where Jean, Claire and Christine have decided to stop for a swim. The sun is bright and warm and its light spangles the rippling water. Christine is seductive and flirtatious with Jean while Claire remains guarded and cautious. As Jean, Claire and Christine begin walking out of the water onto the beach, Jean, without warning, attacks Christine. Claire intervenes in the attack and screams at Jean to walk into the water away from her and her sister. The camera remains on Claire and Christine as Christine recovers from the attack and Claire continues to scream at Jean to walk further out into the water. Then, in a startling reverse shot, the camera looks out on Jean standing in the water in the distance as a blurred, indiscernible shape. It is worth recalling Levinas' observation here that even in the daylight it is possible to speak of different forms of night: "Illuminated objects can appear to us as though in twilight shapes...things and beings strike us as though they no longer composed a world, and were swimming in the chaos of their own existence."¹⁸⁸



Figure 16: Cast in shadow, Jean looks into the water where Claire and Christine are swimming.



Figure 17: In a counter-shot to Christine and Claire's terrified expressions, Jean appears before them, monstrous; as a "twilight shape."

In an introduction to her interview with Phillippe Grandrieux, critic/theorist Nicole Brenez links Grandrieux's cinema and his figurations of the human body with a broader impulse she sees belonging to the modernity of Freud, Artaud, Foucault and Deleuze. What Brenez sees in Grandrieux is a privileging of the body and its essences, a whole spectrum of experience grounding the body not only to itself, but to the world in which it finds itself; a world where it not only finds itself among others, but a world it must share with the other and, in recognizing the other as '*an-other*,' must bear responsibility for that other. Brenez insists Grandrieux's cinema "...works to invest immanence, using every type of sensation, drive and affect...down into the most shadowy depths of our sensory experiences, to the point of confronting the sheer terror of the death drive, or the still more immense and bottomless terror of the unconscious, of total opacity."¹⁸⁹

What Levinas articulates in his conception of horror as a product of the night and what Grandrieux's cinema appears to explicitly render is the limit of phenomenology when light dissipates and objects begin to dissolve in darkness. The criticism that bodies are objectified in post-Wall art cinema is pervasive. As Tim Palmer observes, "the haunting diagnosis of the cinema du corps: people are objects, objects are people." In *Sombre*, it is not so much a matter of objectification, but the consequences of objectification that is important. It may seem as if objects are people and people are objects, but Grandrieux's cinema illustrates that this state of things is insupportable. His cinema points to the ontological fact that the human condition is founded upon relationality. It is on this account that I see Levinas' philosophy and Grandrieux's cinema drawn into taut relation.

As Levinas scholar Cathryn Vasseleu puts it, "Night reveals the limits of phenomenology in the body's carnality." Vasseleu maintains that Levinas' *There is* is unrelated to light, is purely affective, and the source of a horror greater than the anxiety

found in Heidegger's fundamental ontology. She says that Levinas' "night" is itself an ontological event that reveals the heterological nature of embodied subjectivity.¹⁹⁰ Or as Alphonso Lingis puts it, the night is "not a substance, but an event."¹⁹¹ But, I would add, that the event of the night is the very fact of its becoming substance. There is a remarkable scene at the end of *La vie nouvelle* where the American man – still pursuing the prostitute – is led into the basement of a building where seemingly dozens of women are confined in complete darkness. In keeping with his commitment to the *night* as a key theme in his work, Grandrieux shoots the scene in complete darkness with a *thermal camera*, which produces images by detecting heat signatures in the frame.¹⁹² As the women scream and crawl around in the dark, their bodies are only made visible by the heat being generated by their fear-seized bodies. In a sense, Grandrieux uses a thermal camera to literally *open the body's night*, rendering visible not only bodies submerged in darkness, but bodies submerged in absence itself; absence as an event in which things do, in fact, become substantive.

Grandrieux's films are exemplary of what I have been calling continental horror films because they do not conceive horror solely in the context of monstrosity, or marauding entities, or gory violence. He is invested rather in drawing horror *proper* out of the night of being (Levinasian absence) and relationality, and making both legible and tangible on the surface of the image. What this reading of Grandrieux through Levinas hopes to illuminate is not only that Grandrieux's cinema seems especially amenable to Levinasian philosophies of the night, but that it Grandrieux's images and scenarios are incisive visualizations of Levinas' understanding of horror. It is this shared revelatory dimension between post-Wall European art cinema's canonical directors – Haneke, Dumont, Breillat, and Grandrieux – and continental philosophies of horror that forms the ground of the continental horror film. In each of the preceding chapters of this dissertation I have argued for this close conceptual relationship between post-Wall European art cinema and continental philosophy, but Grandrieux's cinema marks something of a departure from other directors of continental horror films. In the work of Haneke and Dumont (and others), at times the influence of the American horror film is clearly defined, and, in fact, borrowed themes and a shared structural resemblance to the American horror film are often used strategically. Grandrieux avoids such formal and thematic connections to the horror genre, yet – when we bring Levinas into the equation – the feeling of horror through absence transcends the thematic and is raised to the level of allegory.

I began this dissertation by noting how the rise of the serial killer at the end of the horror film's modern period, and the release of John McNaughton's *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*, marked a pivotal moment in the development of the genre. It is worth recalling McNaughton's remarks after making the film that he wanted to "get to the root of horror." While I believe McNaughton's film was certainly transformative in its interpretation of the horror genre, it falls short of getting to the root of horror. On the other hand, Grandrieux's serial killer film *Sombre* accomplishes this feat exactly. In this sense, not only is Grandrieux's work exemplary of continental horror, but it also presages its future conceptual and technological possibilities, and provides an alternative vision of what the horror film can be.

Conclusion

I have developed the term *continental horror film* not out of a desire to create another category that constrains and categorizes a group of films. I see the term, rather, as a response to a series of critical misinterpretations that have shaped general perceptions of violence and sex in post-Wall European art cinema. I have argued in this dissertation that discussions of horror in continental philosophy have long been ignored in the scholarship on the horror film, and that the films of the so-called “new extremism” are especially apposite in forging this missing connection. It is not a coincidence that all of the films referred to as “new extremism” have been produced in continental Europe over the past 3 decades by filmmakers with explicit interests in continental philosophy (Dumont is a former professor of philosophy, Grandrieux’s descriptions of his work disclose interests in Deleuze and Spinoza, and Breillat’s scripts are often thinly veiled feminist manifestos). For these reasons, the continental horror film is not intended to be a categorically synthetic construction, but is meant to be an apt and succinct description of an evolving mode of cinematic practice.

After seeing the films of Michael Haneke in the 1990s at the Toronto International Film Festival, and later, those of Bruno Dumont, Gaspar Noë, Catherine Breillat, and Phillipe Grandrieux, it seemed self-evident to me that these directors were making horror movies. But links between these filmmakers and the American horror film were generally ignored as the idea of the “new extremism” in European art cinema became the primary rubric for discussing these challenging and confrontational films. This project began as an attempt to remedy this oversight. As I argued in chapter 1, the term “new extremism” is misleading because there is nothing “new” or “extreme” about the films to which it refers. However graphic the violence and sex may be, it is generally symmetrical within the context of its surrounding formal and narrative elements, and there are numerous precedents to be found for both in the canon of European art cinema. More importantly, in films like Haneke’s *Funny Games* (1997), Dumont’s *Twentynine Palms* (2003), and Noë’s *Irreversible* (2002) the visual and thematic associations with the American horror film are very clear. But, while there are points of contact between post-Wall European art cinema and the American horror film, there are also significant areas of divergence.

In chapters 2 and 3, I proposed that making a distinction between horror and terror best illustrates these differences by aligning the formal devices and narrative strategies of the American horror film with terror, and representations of violence in post-Wall European art cinema with horror. The point of this distinction is that horror in the popular imagination – the “horror” film – does not align with the concept and feeling of horror *proper* as it has been written about and understood in continental philosophy and critical theory (where horror is a foundational concept). I showed how terror is an external phenomenon bound up with space, spectacle, and the proximity of a threat, while on the other hand, horror is an internal, metaphysical phenomenon linked to time, absence, and memory. Arguing for these distinctions between horror and terror in cinema have significant ramifications on the history of the horror genre and how it has been received as both a critical object and as a popular text, for not only are we compelled to reevaluate what we mean when we say we are watching horror, but the feelings these

works inspire in audiences and the critical frameworks that are relied upon to conceptualize such feelings must also be reconsidered.

The central difficulty of this dissertation has been bringing together two interpretive approaches to horror films that are often considered separately. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 noted how horror film experience has been mostly an area of inquiry for cognitive theory. Alternatively, I propose phenomenological methods from continental philosophy to explain how continental horror films arouse feelings of horror *proper* that diverge from the experiences of terror that are quintessential to the modern period of the American horror film. I argue that the very category of the horror film can be reconceived and reordered by shifting discussions of film experience away from cognitive theoretical models of film reception, and redirecting it toward continental philosophy. The emergence of the continental horror film also places the historiography of the “horror” genre in a new light. Histories of the horror film have either charted the genre’s development in a cultural/ideological context as a chronological phenomenon, or addressed the feelings horror films inspire as an ahistorical phenomenon. In this project, I have taken these concerns to be integrated rather than separated.

A survey of the existing literature on the horror film reveals that the most influential and widely read cultural, political, and ideological approaches to the genre generally ignores the scholarship on how “horror” films make us feel and why audiences seem to perpetually desire negative aesthetic experiences. The opposite also holds true, as scholarship on emotions and affects related to “horror” film participation tends equally to disregard the cultural, political, and ideological aspects of horror film production and reception. For example, in Carroll’s “philosophy of horror” he seems to willfully ignore the work of Robin Wood (*Hollywood From Vietnam to Reagan*, 1986) and Andrew Tudor (*Monsters and Mad Scientists: A Cultural History of the Horror Movie*, 1990), while, likewise, historians like Tudor or film theorists like Carol Clover (*Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*, 1993) do not seem to be concerned with what Carroll or other “emotion” theorists have to say about audience experience.

Recent scholarship on emotion, affect, and horror film reception outside the domain of cognitive theory, such as Anna Powell’s *Deleuze and Horror Film* (2006) and Julian Hanich’s *Cinematic Emotions in Horror Films and Thrillers: The Aesthetic Paradox of Pleasurable Fear* (2012) still generally consider the feelings horror films inspire as an ahistorical phenomenon. These studies tend to ignore the rich social, political, and cultural criticisms that have guided discussions of the “horror” film since the late 1970s. Instead of taking heed of what the other has had to say about the horror film, these approaches tend to run parallel to each other. In contrast, I have argued that a history of the horror film that takes seriously both feeling-based theories of film reception and socio-cultural/ideological critiques presents a different view of the history of horror films and their future possibilities. My hope is that this integrationist approach to the study of the horror film, which gives equal weight to the feelings horror movies elicit, and the cultural contexts in which they are framed, will appear more frequently. It is important that we recognize cultural histories of horror and its feeling-based studies not as discreet areas of scholarly attention, but as related phenomena bearing directly upon one another.

While I have referred to continental horror as the *third phase* of the horror film, I also see its emergence as a *first phase* in the representation of moving image horror

proper. This dissertation has attempted to return to horror some of the gravity of its authentic meaning by breaking down generic conceptual barriers that have perpetuated and sustained its misrepresentation in cinema for more than a century.

Introduction

¹ See Radcliffe's *On the Supernatural in Poetry*, published posthumously in *New Monthly Magazine*, Vol 6, No 1. (1826).

² Trailers for the films *Last House on the Left* (1972) and *The Amityville Horror* (1979) use the terms "terror" and "horror" interchangeably and indiscriminately. Posters advertising horror movies such as *American Werewolf in London* (1981), *Texas Chainsaw Massacre 3* (1990), *Creepshow 2* (1987), *The Raven* (1963), *Creature* (1985), and *The Alligator People* (1959), just to name a few, all use the word "terror" to promote the feelings prospective audiences can anticipate.

³ What little there was, given the fact the Gothic novel was considered to be a low form of pulp literature throughout the 19th century. See Walter Kendrick's *The Thrill of Fear: 200 Years of Scary Entertainment*.

⁴ Badiou, Alain. *Cinema*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 205.

⁵ Quandt, James. "Flesh & Blood: Sex and violence in recent French cinema." *Artforum*, (February 2004).

⁶ In 1971 Bernardo Bertolucci's *Last Tango in Paris* shocked audiences with its explicit depictions of sexuality, Pier Palo Passolini entered the annals of infamy with his *Salò, or 120 Days of Sodom* in 1976, In *Mouchette*, Bresson killed animals on film and numerous other art films began exploring ways of incorporating graphic violence and sex into its narratives. Through the 1970s and 1980s this impulse did not abate.

⁷ This observation can be supported by the "first book length study" of these films edited by Tina Horeck and Tina Kendall titled, *The New Extremism in Cinema: From France to Europe* (2011). The term 'new extremism' also figures prominently in Martine Beugnet's recent book *Cinema and Sensation: French Film and the Art of Transgression* (2007). It has also been the subject of several articles by Jonathan Romney ('Le Sex and Violence,' 'L'Humanite: Rapture or Ridicule?') and Tim Palmer ('Style and Sensation in the Contemporary French Cinema of the Body,' 'Under Your Skin: Marina de Van and the Contemporary French cinema du corps'), among others. The Wikipedia page for the term "New French Extremity" went online on July 10, 2008 and was last modified as of this writing on March 19, 2013.

⁸ What I mean to suggest here is that the cinema is capable of evoking actual negative experiences that should not be denuded of their force because they are inspired by an aesthetic form.

⁹ For examples of these themes in Film Studies see respectively: Clover's *Men, Women, Chainsaws: Gender and the Horror Film* (1993), Wood's *Hollywood From Vietnam to Reagan and Beyond* (1986), and Zizek's *The Plague of Fantasies* (1997).

¹⁰ From the pocket companion to the “horror” genre edited by Steven Jay Schneider: *Introduction to 101 Horror Movies*.

¹¹ See Ed S Tan’s *Emotion and the Structure of Narrative Film: Film as an Emotion Machine* (1995).

Chapter 1

¹² Quandt, *Artforum*.

¹³ Horeck, Tanya and Tina Kendall. *The New Extremism in Cinema: From France to Europe*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 4.

¹⁴ Throughout this dissertation I will use the term *participants* to name individuals commonly referred to in film studies as *spectators* or *viewers*.

¹⁵ Horeck and Kendall, 1.

¹⁶ In *More Moralism* Quandt amends his initial claim that the tendency is French and notes Haneke pre-dates the filmmakers he focuses on in his article.

¹⁷ Galt, Rosalind. *The New European Cinema: Redrawing the Map* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 2.

¹⁸ Quandt has since addressed his initial oversight on this matter. See his essay ‘More Moralism from that Wordy Fuck’ in *The New Extremism in Cinema: From France to Europe*.

¹⁹ Galt, 2.

²⁰ Hobsbawm, Eric. *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World 1914 – 1991* (Vintage: London, 1996), 5.

²¹ Galt, 6.

²² Hobsbawm, 6.

²³ Zizek, Slavoj. *On Violence* (New York: Picador, 2008), 25.

²⁴ Hobsbawm, 38.

²⁵ Some examples of the concept of excess used in the scholarship of “The New Extremism” can be found in Martine Beugnet’s “The Wounded Screen, Neil Archer’s “Beyond Anti-Americanism, Beyond Anti-Euro-Centrism: Locating Bruno Dumont’s

Twentynine Palms in the context of European Cinematic Extremism,” and Lisa Coulthard’s “Interrogating the Obscene.”

²⁶ Thompson, Kristen (ed. Phillip Rosen). (“The Concept of Cinematic Excess,” *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*. Columbia University Press: New York, 1986), 140.

²⁷ See Stephen Heath, “Film and System: Terms of Analysis Pt. 1”. *Screen*, (Spring 1975).

²⁸ Thompson, 140.

²⁹ Williams, Linda. “Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess.” *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 605.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 605.

³¹ Wells, Paul. *The Horror Genre: From Beelzebub to Blair Witch*. London: Wallflower Press, 2000), 25.

³² Cherry, Brigid. *Horror*. Routledge: New York, 2009. Cherry expands on this point as follows: “Thus from the 1970s on we see apocalyptic narratives (Night of the Living Dead), the birth of the Antichrist (Rosemary’s Baby, The Omen), a preoccupation with consumerism (Dawn of the Dead, Christine), the dysfunctional family (Texas Chain Saw Massacre, The Shining), an obsession with serial killers (Halloween, Friday the 13th), and the crisis of identity and the transformation of the body (The Howling, The Thing, Shivers). We see this ambivalence emerging in the closing scenes of the 1978 version of Invasion of the Body Snatchers (which ends on Matthew’s scream as he points Nancy out as still human) and Body Snatchers (where, even though she and Tim escape, the films end with Marti stating in a voiceover that ‘you can only stay awake so long’). In this way these horror films are a document of anxieties in the post-war, post-Fordist, postmodern America.”

³³ Horror film director John Carpenter, in less rigorous, though no less incisive terms, also sees the horror genre as being divisible into two parts. In the documentary *Nightmares in Red, White, and Blue* (2009), Carpenter says, “Essentially there are two kinds of horror movies: the first is all about where evil is; the location of it. The Wiseman around the campfire tells us that evil is out there in the dark. It’s beyond the woods, it’s the other tribe; it’s the people that don’t look like us, that don’t speak like us. That’s the external evil. The other. The second kind of horror movie is about the other location of evil. The Wiseman by the campfire tells us the location of evil is right here in our own human hearts. That particular type of story is a harder one to tell. It is harder to say, I have met the enemy and he is us; we are the enemy.” Carpenter’s description is broadly applicable to the two-phase formulations of Wells, Tudor, and Cherry, but when considered strictly within the modern period of the horror film after 1960, Carpenter’s insights point out not

only the stories the modern horror film tells obsessively, as Cherry describes, but also the stories it has trouble telling; that is, the horror movies about the evil inside of our own human hearts -- the self-enemy/enemy-self formulation.

³⁴ Wood, 78.

³⁵ Jancovich, 16.

³⁶ Wells, 75.

³⁷ *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) had already located monstrosity within the home.

³⁸ Hutchings, Peter. *Hammer and Beyond: The British Horror Film* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993), 101.

³⁹ Jancovich, 19. In a chapter titled "The Emergence of Contemporary Horror," from his pamphlet *American Horror From 1951 to the Present*

⁴⁰ Wells, 76.

⁴¹ In his book *Nightmare Movies*, Kim Newman reiterates this point when he writes, "Technically, many supernatural horror film monsters are serial killers."⁴¹ For Newman, like Wells, "The serial killer has emerged as the dominant fictional monster of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century."

⁴² An interesting point that Wells adds here is that allied with a fear of other people is also an equally powerful fear *for* other people. Haneke adds an interesting twist to this response when in the *The Seventh Continent* the only time any real concern is expressed, it is not for other people, instead it is expressed by the little girl for the fish after her father smashes the fish tank with an axe. On an unrelated note, Wells observes, "Interestingly, the predominant models of the serial killer in real life are murderers of children, sexual partners and prostitutes, and it is clear that in many instances these actions constitute an assault on familial and social structures that marginalize the individual."

⁴³ Taking a quote from Jonathan Demme: "At the moment the one thing that is able to utterly and uncomplicatedly fill us with true terror is the serial killer, because we know that any one of us could be a victim for whatever serial killer is seeking our type of person."

⁴⁴ Though the film was made in 1986 and screened at the Chicago International Film Festival it did not receive nationwide distribution until 1990.

⁴⁵ DVD commentary: Optimum Releasing, 2003.

⁴⁶ Henry: *Portrait of a Serial Killer*, Dark Sky Films: 2005.

⁴⁷ This is aptly described by Robin Wood in *Hollywood From Vietnam to Reagan* when he writes, “Confronted over the past few years with the proliferation of increasingly violent and gruesome low-budget horror movies centered on psychopathic killers, one may take away the impression of one undifferentiated stream of massacre, mutilation and terrorization, a single interminable chronicle of blood-letting called something like “When a Stranger Calls after Night School on Halloween of Friday the Thirteenth, Don’t Answer the Phone and Don’t Go Into the House because He Knows You’re There and is Dressed to Kill.”

⁴⁸ Schmid, David. “A Philosophy of Serial Killing: Sade, Nietzsche, and Brady at the Gates of Janus.” *Serial Killers* (ed. S. Waller). London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

⁴⁹ Schmid, 36. The literature on Nietzsche’s concepts of the *ubermensche* and *will to power* is voluminous enough to warrant neglect of its rehearsal here, but the point worth stressing, a point often misleadingly advanced by writers wishing to forge a connection between Nietzsche’s philosophy and Hitler’s insanity, is highlighted by Schmid when he writes, “To the extent that either of these concepts are explained at all, they are presented only as the inspiration for Hitler and Nazism...and therefore as synonymous with domination; in other words, there is no mention of the fact that the *ubermensch* concept is about overcoming one’s own limitations rather than subjugating others, and *will to power* is never associated with self-assertion, but only with the control of others”

⁵⁰ Seltzer, p.4

⁵¹ *Spoorloos* marks the emergence of a new type of horror film, one in which the perpetrator is exceedingly domestic and exhibits all of the qualities of a “normal” family man. He is never caught nor are his actions pathologized, he simply commits an exceedingly horrific act and eventually reveals to his victim’s husband what happened to his wife by putting him through the very same act of being buried alive.

⁵² Schmid, 65

⁵³ *Ibid*, 36

⁵⁴ In a stunning reversal of logic, Seltzer offers these thoughts related to the ‘naming event’ of the serial killer in the mid-70s by Robert Ressler and the FBI. With astonishing lucidity, Seltzer writes, “A naming event is more complex than a simple nominalism; it is not that the concept or category is simply “made up,” but that the make-up of such concepts has its own internal “torque.” It involves the positing of a category or a type of person as a sort of point of attraction around which a range of acts, effects, fantasies, and representations then orbit. But it involves too the empty circularity by which the social construction of a kind of person becomes the point of attraction of the kind of person who traumatically experiences himself as nothing ‘deeper’ than a social construction.” (108).

Social construction v. Self-construction. Seltzer continues from the ideas above, “The social construction assumption, at the level of the subject, is that there is nothing deeper to the subject than his formation from the outside in. Following Joan Copjec’s analysis in her book *Read My Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists*, Seltzer notes that “on this view, interior states become merely ‘the subjective synonym of the objective fact of the subject’s construction,’ and thus ‘pleasure becomes a redundant concept and the need to theorize it is largely extinguished.’” Seltzer further adds, “The subject itself, that is, becomes a redundant, and largely extinguished, concept. It may then be possible to understand the pleasure-killer as one version of the largely extinguished subject: the ‘devoided’ and predead subject, for whom pleasure has become bound to the endless persecution of pleasure and the endless emptying or voiding of interiors, in himself and in others. This kind of subject may then be one version of the person in whom the ‘social ego’ has replaced the agency pertaining to the person: agency replaced with the merely ‘personalized’ form a social determination painfully and traumatically drilled into and fused onto the individual.”

⁵⁵ Was this not in a similar sense what Jack the Ripper did when he took his medical practice to the streets of London? Or what Powell’s protagonist did when he took his photography experiments to the streets of London? Some form of structural logic seems to always subtend the actions of the serial killer.

⁵⁶ Seltzer, 141.

⁵⁷ Simmel, 404.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 405.

⁵⁹ Seltzer, 42.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 43.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 107.

⁶² Leyton, Elliot. P. 315

⁶³ Only in rare instances such as *The Blair Witch Project* are there changes to the paradigm.

⁶⁴ Dumont, Bruno. DVD commentary.

Chapter 3

⁶⁵ It is worth noting here that its not so much that the violence has changed, but that new forms of media and the speed with which images of violence are disseminated permit

new forms of visibility that allow us to see violence in new ways. In some sense, as Baudrillard forecasted, we see violence in ways that are more real than real.

⁶⁶ Cavarero, Adriana. *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

⁶⁷ Wright, Angela. *Gothic Fiction*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 41.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 39.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 41.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 47.

⁷¹ In his book *Literary Hours* from [add year], the critic Nathan Drake complimented Radcliffe's ability to deftly utilize effects of terror in her writing so that in "many scenes truly terrific in their conception, yet so softened down, and the mind so much relieved, by the intermixture of beautiful description, or pathetic incident, that the impression of the whole never becomes too strong, never degenerates into horror, but pleasurable is ever the dominating result."⁴⁵

⁷² Having consulted etymologies for "horror" in Russian, Japanese and German the word is consistently used to indicate a physical response to the thought of a repugnant thing ("spiders give me the horrors") Though it may occasionally be used to refer to an immediate reaction to something ("she screamed in horror"), which most likely emerges out of the clinical sense of the word in the 15th and 16th centuries when shudders and shivers were referred to as "horrors". It can also describe a sense of one being "filled" with horror, as if someone were being possessed by a feeling they are incapable of remaining impermeable to, a sense concomitant with its use in biblical contexts. When used as an adjective to describe a thing or a quality or a person it retains a sense of indeterminacy, as something excessive. Comprehensive etymologies of "horror" can be found online at: www.OED.com. All of the etymological material in this paper has been sourced from the digital OED and cross-referenced against its published version.

⁷³ Varma, Devendra. *The Gothic flame, being a history of the Gothic novel in England: its origins, efflorescence, disintegration, and residuary influences*. London: A Baker, 1957.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 110.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 112.

⁷⁶ Hume, Robert. "Gothic Versus Romantic: A Revaluation of the Gothic Novel," *PMLA* 84, 1969, 285.

⁷⁷ Platzner, Robert. "Gothic versus Romantic: A Rejoinder" *PMLA* 86, 1971, 269.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 272.

⁷⁹ Thompson, G. Richard. *Romantic Gothic Tales: 1798 – 1840*. New York: Harper & Row, 1979, 79.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 80.

⁸¹ St. Armand, Barton Levi. *The Roots of Horror in the Fiction of H.P. Lovecraft*. Dragon Pr: New York, 1977, 25.

⁸² Bayer-Berenbaum, Linda. *The Gothic Imagination: Expansions in Gothic Literature and Art*. (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1982), 54.

⁸³ Machen, Arthur. *Tales of Horror and the Supernatural: With an Introduction by Philip Van Doren Stern*. Baker: London, 1970. (I have added "terror" in brackets to indicate the sense of fear VDS describes is not dissimilar from theories of terror in Gothic scholarship)

⁸⁴ This quote from Kant comes from page 57 of Peter McCormick's book *The Negative Sublime*.

⁸⁵ McCormick, 57.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 14.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 57.

⁸⁸ Benjamin, in his seminal essay "Critique of Violence," has most famously expounded on the legitimation of violence within legal systems as a matter pertaining to the question of means satisfying a just or unjust end.⁸⁸ He opposes natural law to positive law and sees in the latter that the justification of means is of central concern to it, whereas in the former, violence is conceived of as an organic product of nature, "as it were a raw material." In both categories, means and ends are formulated as being dependent upon one another. As Benjamin puts it, "Natural law attempts, by the justness of ends, to 'justify' means, positive law to 'guarantee' the justness of the ends through the justification of means." Benjamin opposes the interdependency of both of these formulations and instead posits that neither a theory based upon just means nor of just ends is satisfactory to a critique of violence. Thus, while natural law and positive law are structurally opposed in their logic, they both rely upon a causal relation between means and ends.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 51.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 4.

⁹¹ See Paul Wells' *The Horror Genre*.

⁹² Tudor, Andrew. *Monsters and Mad Scientists: A Cultural History of the Horror Film*. (New York: Blackwell, 1991), 48.

⁹³ *Ibid*, 8

⁹⁴ There are numerous hybrid cases where revenge and pathology or supernatural and revenge are the motivating factors for violence.

⁹⁵ Silverman, Kaja. *Flesh of my Flesh*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 180.

⁹⁶ Artaud, 118.

⁹⁷ Again, this description of Kurtz could also be applied to Raymond in *Spoorloos*.

⁹⁸ Jameson, Fredric. *The Antinomies of Realism*. (London: Verso, 2013), 232.

⁹⁹ The original scene from Joseph Conrad's Novel *Heart of Darkness* serves as an instructive point of reference: "Anything approaching the change that came over his features I have never seen before, and hope to never see again. Oh, I wasn't touched. I was fascinated. It was as though a veil had been rent. I saw on that ivory face the expression of somber pride, of ruthless power, of craven terror – of an intense and hopeless despair. Did he live his life again in every detail of desire, temptation, surrender during that supreme moment of complete knowledge? He cried in a whisper at some image, at some vision – he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath: 'The Horror! The Horror!'" p.79

¹⁰⁰ Scarry, Elaine. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 28

¹⁰¹ "Even the grossest suffering can be rationalized. The torturer may be involved in a sadomasochistic relation to the person he torments, but he must also be removed – that is, he must also refuse to experience the body in pain." Elkins, 140.

¹⁰² Scarry, 4

¹⁰³ Elkins, James. *The Object Stares Back: On the Nature of Seeing*. New York: Mariner Books, 1997), 108.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 115.

¹⁰⁵ David Cronenberg's *Videodrome* with its pulsing, monstrous televisions and videotapes is a point of contact here.

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- ¹⁰⁶ Junger, Ernst. *Storm of Steel*. (Penguin: New York, 2004 [1922]).
- ¹⁰⁷ Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.
- ¹⁰⁸ Cavarero, Adriana. *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.
- ¹⁰⁹ Arendt, Hannah. "Mankind and Terror," *Essays in Understanding, 1930 – 1954*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1994), p. 297.
- ¹¹⁰ Butler, Judith. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London: Verso, 2004.
- ¹¹¹ Cavarero, 41.
- ¹¹² *Ibid*, 52.
- ¹¹³ *Ibid*, 37.
- ¹¹⁴ Cavarero is most concerned with the logic and political ontology of suicide bombing and as a phenomenon of violence. She coins the term "horrorism" the refer to these extreme instances of violence and writes: "Horror has to do precisely with the killing of uniqueness, in other words; it consists in an attack on the ontological material that, transforming unique beings into a mass of superfluous beings whose [impersonal murder] also takes from them their own death."
- ¹¹⁵ Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. (Columbia University Press: New York, 1982).
- ¹¹⁶ Hegel, G.W.F. *Phenomenology of the Spirit*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 117/194.
- ¹¹⁷ Butler, 41.
- ¹¹⁸ If there were space to pursue the comparison further, it might be suggested that the last sentence of Kristeva's notion of "a vortex of summons and repulsions places the one haunted by it literally beside himself" is strikingly similar to what occurs in the psyche of the unhappy consciousness.
- ¹¹⁹ Again, it is worth speculating on his Hegel's awareness of the emergence of the gothic genre at the time of his writing the *Phenomenology* and how aware he was of period debates regarding horror.

¹²⁰ Elkins, James. *The Object Stares Back: On The Nature of Seeing*. (Chicago: Mainer Books, 1997), 87.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, 107.

¹²² It is worth noting here that Resnais titled his film on the other great atrocity of the 20th century, *Night and Fog*.

¹²³ A remark the director make during an on-stage interview at the Hot Docs Documentary festival in Toronto in 2006.

¹²⁴ It is worth recalling the horror of a similar scene from Steven Spielberg's holocaust epic *Schindler's List* (1993) when Schindler (Liam Neeson) approaches his car and notices what at first appears to be light snowfall, but what he soon realizes is in fact human ash that has spewed out from the chimney's of Nazi crematoriums. At Hiroshima, black rain also fell from the sky.

¹²⁵ Not surprisingly, the narrator often describes the bullfight as a "solar blaze" and the bull as a "solar monster". "Solar" becomes an interchangeable adjective in a number of contexts throughout the story.

¹²⁶ As Richter once said in an interview, "I'm not trying to imitate a photograph, I'm trying to make one. And if I disregard the assumption that a photograph is a piece of paper exposed to light, then I am practicing photography by other means."

Chapter 5

¹²⁷ Sobchack, Vivian. "What My Fingers Knew: The Cinesthetic Subject, or Vision in the Flesh." *Senses of Cinema*. 2004: 58.

¹²⁸ Shaviro, Steven. *The Cinematic Body*. (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 11.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, p.28.

¹³⁰ I think there are important possible amendments to be made to the self-reflexive arguments in cognitive psychological theories of film emotion. When a "spectator" is watching a film, it would be negligent to attempt to develop a theory of emotion as a cognitive response pattern based on a reflexive assessment reminding the "spectator" that he is watching a movie, or advancing a position that maintains we 'play' along with the emotions cued on-screen (often in a group situation...comedy and "horror" especially) and other cause/effect models. These theories seem to neglect the possibility that a "spectator's" attention is not rapt for the full duration of a movie. The crucial function of the imaginary is not separable from film experience in the manner that we simply know it's not real, but suspend disbelief; or that through the complex mechanisms of

identification we form an imaginary link with our perceived surrogates on screen. The “spectator’s” imagination is a screen that is constantly illuminated – or it might be better expressed as “stimulated”. The images on the screen, the image-thoughts the screen stimulates in the viewer’s imagination, the effects of one’s immediate surroundings on these image-thoughts, moments where one’s concentration from the diegesis is broken by a train of thought potentially expanding on the images or feelings in the film > the screen of the “spectator’s” imagination and the screen of the cinema are actively imbricated and the conjunction of an imaginary procession of images with the illuminated images on the screen forms the true horizon of film experience.

¹³¹ Carroll, 26.

¹³² Palmer, Tim. *Brutal Intimacy: Analyzing Contemporary French Cinema*. (Connecticut: Wesleyan, 2011), 70.

¹³³ In this cognitive-psychological approach the question of what constitutes a genuine emotion is informed by the context in which this emotion is experienced. This question of what constitutes a genuine emotion and if the feelings felt in the film experience are indeed genuine emotions seems curious to me, for in the same respect that a film theorist studying emotional responses in audiences looks to narrative structure as a mediating system, the everyday life of an individual structures and mediates their emotional responses not so dissimilarly. This claim to genuine emotion outside of aesthetic experience makes it seem as if emotions spring from sourceless reservoirs unbounded by context or the layered structures of enworldedness and consciousness; which are themselves as much mediating systems (though doubtless different) as narrative cinema.

¹³⁴ Hanich, Julian. *Cinematic Emotions in Horror Films and Thrillers: The Aesthetic Paradox of Pleasurable Fear*. (London: Routledge, 2011), 5.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, 19

¹³⁶ Hanich, 21

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, 254

¹³⁸ Hanich, 249

¹³⁹ Laine, Tarja, 11

¹⁴⁰ See *The Affective Turn and The Affect Theory Reader*.

¹⁴¹ Munsterberg, Hugo. *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study*. New York: Routledge, 2002. p.104.

¹⁴² *Ibid*, 105.

¹⁴³ *Ibid*, 105.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 105.

¹⁴⁵ Sobchack, Vivian. *The Address of The Eye*. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), 38.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 56.

¹⁴⁷ This phrasing is not insignificant for it indicates Münsterberg's awareness of the artifice of the spectacle, yet this fact does not dissuade him from asserting the reciprocity of feeling between spectator and character.

¹⁴⁸ Morin, Edgar. *The Cinema, or The Imaginary Man*. (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 86.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 87. (His italics)

¹⁵⁰ See page 28 for his suggestion that there is a need for refined or expanded vocabulary to account the differences in feelings of fear. My response to this is, these distinctions already exist, but our misunderstanding of key terms and the scope of feelings these terms refer to makes it seem as if new or expanded vocabulary is needed. Cavarero's own project on contemporary violence is an instance of this type of reaction: the word horrorism only encumbers the already rich meaning of the term 'horror'. If we had a more finely tuned understanding of the term horror in relation to cinema, some of the confusions around negative feelings and the supposedly inherent paradoxes could be clarified.

¹⁵¹ Hanich, 233

¹⁵² *Ibid*, 233.

¹⁵³ "In sum," Hanich writes, "cinematic fear is a volitionally pursued, pleasurable foregrounding of the of the body. This foregrounding is pleasurable because, in the relatively safe environment of the movie theater, it enables a strong involvement of the self. Fearful emotions are more than something lived through and thus more than something happening to me. Instead they often imply an experiencing of the self."

¹⁵⁴ Laine, Targa. *Feeling Cinema. Emotional Dynamics in Film Studies*. (Middlebury: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 5.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 1

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 1

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 8

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 11

¹⁵⁹ “The phenomenological approach, however, is not a novel approach to experiences. Jean Paul Sartre provides a similar analysis. In his book *Being and Nothingness* Sartre considers what it is like to experience being looked at by another person. For Sartre, the way that we see ourselves is commonly determined by the way that others interpret us.”

¹⁶⁰ Palmer, 58.

¹⁶¹ Beugnet, Martine. *Cinema and Sensation: French Film and the Art of Transgression*. (Chicago: Southern Illinois Press, 2007), 37.

¹⁶² This metonymic relation Silverman draws between relationality and the proximity of bodies to water in Malick’s film corresponds with the seemingly inexplicable opening sequence of Denis’ film. Of this metonymic relation between bodies and water Silverman says, “The sea is...Malick’s primary metaphor both for the totality to which we all belong and the experiences through which it is revealed to us, and the common denominator of all these experiences is *touch*.” As a digression, I would add that light and luminosity are equally important metaphors in Malick’s universe.

¹⁶³ I don’t think that it is a coincidence that the serial killer sub-genre of the American horror film arguably achieves its apex with *Silence of the Lambs* – certainly the most lauded and successful serial killer film in movie history – around the transitional moment between the second and third phases of the horror film in which the figure of the serial killer plays a crucial role.

¹⁶⁴ It is also worth noting that the film’s other serial killer, Hannibal Lectur, provides information to Clarisse Starling only in exchange for personal information about her traumatic past. In other words, Hannibal is only interested in relationality with Clarisse.

¹⁶⁵ The puppet show scene in Truffaut’s *Les quatre cent coups* (1959), in which a group of small children spontaneously reacts to a puppet show of Little Red Riding Hood – jumping up and down in excitement, yelling, gasping at the scary parts, and shouting instructions the woodsman who has to kill the wolf – is one example of this.” Martine Beugnet would also cite this moment from Truffaut’s film, instead linking the scene to an important scene from *Sombre*. Beugnet writes, “A group of children at a puppet show. Engrossed in the spectacle, they are shouting, cowering and crying out. The alternation of medium and close up shots, the humming of the sound-track that mingles with the thrilled exclamations and screaming, and the throb of the speeded-up images convey the sheer excitement of the audience, seized with the delightful terror, yet eyes riveted on the spectacle that fascinates and terrifies them.” Beugnet then adds, “Oddly reminiscent of a similar episode in *Les Quatre cent coups*, like Truffaut’s, Grandrieux’s images refer to

the lost pleasure of the complete rapture often experienced in childhood. There is a sinister undercurrent to the sequence in *Sombre*, however, an ominous sense of threat, carried by the vibrations, that appear to permeate the frame from the outer field. In effect, the main character of this enigmatic crime film, the puppet master Jean, is a murderer whose journeys are punctuated by brutal and apparently random killings of women. We do not know this at this stage – indeed, kept of frame, both the puppeteer and his show remain invisible for the duration of these early scenes, The sequence could offer a familiar, endearing sight; yet it creates an unsettling feeling, as if something vampiric was at work in these shots drained of light and images, the distortion of the picture and sound emphasizing the ambiguous mix of pleasure and abysmal fear of the children’s reactions.”

Chapter 6

¹⁶⁶ Hanich, 4.

¹⁶⁷ Peperzak, Adriaan. *To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emanuel Levinas*. (Purdue: Purdue University Press, 2005), 18. One problem here is that the experience of the loss of selfhood here would not be one of terror, but one of horror, as Levinas explicitly states throughout *Existence and Existents*. Again, we see terror and horror erroneously taken to be synonyms.

¹⁶⁸ Sparrow, Tom. *Levinas Unhinged*. London: Zero Books, 2013), 13.

¹⁶⁹ Levinas, Emanuel. *Existence and Existents*. (Duquesne: Duquesne University Press, 2001), 53.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 62

¹⁷¹ Levinas offers this clear summation of horror: The horror of the night, as an experience of the There is, does not then reveal to us a danger of death, nor even a danger of pain. That is what is essential in this analysis. The pure nothingness revealed by anxiety in Heidegger’s analysis does not constitute the There is. There is horror of being and not anxiety over nothingness, fear of being and not fear for being; there is being prey to, delivered over to something that is not a ‘something.’ When night is dissipated with the first rays of the sun, the horror of the night is no longer definable. The ‘something’ appears to be nothing. Horror carries out the condemnation to perpetual reality, to existence with ‘no exits’.”

¹⁷² Hasse, Ulrich and William Large. *Maurice Blanchot*, 73.

¹⁷³ Absence opposes nothingness insofar as the feeling of absence is characterized by a missing thing, it is a feeling that something that was once present is now gone, but should

still be present. Nothingness is characterized by emptiness and it does not presume that anything whatsoever has ever been present at anytime.

¹⁷⁴ Blanchot's *Thomas the Obscure*, 1941; As Sparrow summarizes it, "It is the realization that being's truth is not always exhibited in the light of day, but is sometimes – even essentially – delivered under the cloak of darkness and in the deafening silence of insomnia, that marks Levinas' deployment of the night."

¹⁷⁵ I have been one acquainted with the night./I have walked out in rain—and back in rain./I have outwalked the furthest city light./I have looked down the saddest city lane./I have passed by the watchman on his beat/And dropped my eyes, unwilling to explain./I have stood still and stopped the sound of feet/When far away an interrupted cry/Came over houses from another street./But not to call me back or say good-bye;/And further still at an unearthly height./One luminary clock against the sky/Proclaimed the time was neither wrong nor right./ I have been one acquainted with the night.

¹⁷⁶ Hopkins, Gerard Manley. Accessed on <http://www.bartleby.com/122/40.html>. (July 1, 2014.)

¹⁷⁷ Sparrow, 17.

¹⁷⁸ Chamarette, Jenny. *Phenomenology and the Future of Film: Rethinking Subjectivity Beyond French Cinema*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 192.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 192.

¹⁸⁰ Philippe Grandrieux, 'Sur l'horizon insensé du cinéma', *Cahiers du cinéma hors série: Le siècle du cinéma* (November 2000).

¹⁸¹ Grandrieux in *Experimental Conversations* (2001).

¹⁸² In his Real Manuscript from 1805, Hegel writes, The human being is this night, this empty nothing, that contains everything in its simplicity—an unending wealth of many presentations, images, of which none happens to occur to him—or which are not present. This night, the inner of nature, that exists here— pure self—in phantasmagorical presentations, is night all around it, here shoots a bloody head—there another white shape, suddenly here before it, and just so disappears. One catches sight of this night when one looks human beings in the eye, looking into a Night, which turns terrifying. [For from his eyes] the night of the world hangs out toward us (—into a night that becomes awful, it suspends the night of the world here in an opposition.) In this Night being has returned.¹⁸²

¹⁸³ Given the film's oblique narrative design, another reading of this scene is possible. It could be that the boy walking blindfolded across the field is Jean as a boy who stumbles across a corpse in the woods and this traumatic discovery becomes the quilting point for a kind of psychic decomposition of his worldview.

¹⁸⁴ Silverman, 203.

¹⁸⁵ Chamarette, 196.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 210.

¹⁸⁷ Peperzak, 165.

¹⁸⁸ Levinas, 54.

¹⁸⁹ See Nicole Brenez's interview: "The Body's Night: An Interview with Phillippe Grandrieux"

¹⁹⁰ "In other words, ontology is not exhausted by the visible or the illuminable. Ontology suffers from a fundamental obscurity, opacity, and darkness."

¹⁹¹ Sparrow, 17.

¹⁹² It is worth noting that director Jonathan Demme used a similar tactic of employing night vision at the end of *Silence of the Lambs* as Buffalo Bill stalks Clarice Starling in his darkened basement.

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