Table of Contents

Editors' Note 4
Contributors 5
Preface 6

Articles
Rites of Passing: Conceptual Nihilism in Jean-Paul Civeyrac’s Des filles en noir
— Tim Palmer 10

Sacrificing the Real: Early 20th Century Theatrics and the New Extremism in Cinema
— Andrea Butler 18

Sacrificing the Real: Early 20th Century Theatrics and the New Extremism in Cinema
— Andrea Butler 26

Cinematography and Sensorial Assault in Gaspar Noé’s Irreversible
— Timothy Nicodemo 32

Infecting Images: The Aesthetics of Movement in Rammbock
— Peter Schuck 40

The Quiet Revulsion: Québécois New Extremism in 7 Days
— Dave Alexander 48

Report
Extreme Vancouver
— Chelsea Birks & Dana Keller 54
Editors’ Note

John Carpenter’s 2005 film Cigarette Burns follows an American film buff commissioned by a wealthy collector to track down the most extreme film ever made. La fin absolu du monde, which on its opening night threw the audience into a murderous rage that left the theatre aisles slick with blood. Our cover image recalls the moment shortly after the collector obtains and views the coveted film: driven to an erotic madness by what he has witnessed, and inspired to make a film of his own, he cuts his belly with a straight razor and feeds his intestines into the film projector.

The repeated assertion that La fin absolu du monde “gets inside you” is reminiscent of much of the discourse surrounding a group of recent European films that feature graphic depictions of sex and violence. According to Tanya Horoeck and Tina Kendall, whose preface lays the theoretical groundwork for our issue, visceral affect and a self-reflexive appeal to the spectator characterize European new extremism, which includes films as diverse as Lars von Trier’s Antichrist, Gaspar Noé’s Irreversible, Yorgos Lanthimos’ The Grandmaster, and Claire Denis’ Trouble Every Day. This issue of Cinephile seeks to expand the discourse, calling into question the status and significance of extreme cinema across the globe. Is new extremism a phenomenon specific to Europe, or can we find its correlates in other national cinemas? How fruitful is it to compare films from different cultural contexts based solely on their shared penchant for transgression? And finally, is extremism really “new,” or is it merely a contemporary incarnation of old provocations? These questions lie at the heart of our issue, you demented perverts.

To the editorial board, thank you for your invaluable insights and suggestions. We would also like to express our gratitude to the contributors whose work has appeared in many journals including Cinema Journal, Journal of Film and Video, Studies in French Cinema, The French Review, and Film International. We are currently completing a monograph on the film Irreversible for Palgrave Macmillan’s Controversies series.

Contributors

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Tanya Horoeck is Senior Lecturer in Film Studies at Anglia Ruskin University in Cambridge. She has published widely on the topic of violence and cinema, and is author of the book Public Rape: Representing Violation in Fiction and Film (Routledge 2004) and co-editor (with Tina Kendall) of The New Extremism in Cinema: From France to Europe (Edinburgh UP 2011) and (with Bert Assröm and Katarina Gregersdóttir) Rape in Stieg Larsson’s Millennium Trilogy and Beyond: Contemporary Scandinavian and Anglophone Crime Fiction (Palgrave MacMillan 2012).

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Tim Palmer is the author of Brutal Intimacy: Analysing Contemporary French Cinema (Wesleyan UP 2011) and co-editor of Directory of World Cinema: France (Intellect/ Chicago UP 2012). He is Associate Professor of Film Studies at the University of North Carolina Wilmington, and his work has appeared in many journals including Cinema Journal, Journal of Film and Video, Studies in French Cinema, The French Review, and Film International. He is currently completing a monograph on the film Irreversible for Palgrave Macmillan’s Controversies series.

Kiva Reardon received her BA in Cultural Studies from McGill University, and then went on to complete her MA in Cinema Studies at the University of Toronto. In both degrees she focused on issues of national cinema (particularly Israeli and Canadian) and trauma studies. Working as a film writer based in Toronto, her work has appeared in Cinema Scope, Reverse Shot, and others.

Peter Schuck is a PhD student at the University of Erfurt/Germany. He studied Comparative Literature and Philosophy at the University of Erfurt and the Ruhr-University-Bochum/Germany, and wrote his MA thesis on Discourse of the Sublime. Currently he is writing a PhD thesis on Zombies and the Media of the Posthuman and is a member of the Erfurt graduate forum “Texte.Zeichen.Medien.”

Matthew Wise’s work is inspired by the room of empty boxes his stepfather insisted on cultivating during his youth. Sometimes he is also inspired by tough men, but not in any functional way. He spends most of his time in bed, coveting his neighbour’s cat.

- Chelsea Birks & Dana Keller

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- Chelsea Birks & Dana Keller

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Since we first began writing on the subject of a “new extremism” in French—and then more broadly European—cinema, the paradigm of extreme filmmaking has expanded and taken hold in a number of different contexts, which call precisely for the kind of renewed scholarly evaluation that is being facilitated by this issue of Cinephile. In our book, The New Extremism in Cinema: From France to Europe, we were interested in exploring the notion of extreme cinema in relation to the work of a range of European art house filmmakers such as Gaspar Noé, Lars von Trier, Catherine Breillat, Lukas Moodysson, Michael Haneke, and others. Sensing affinities between the works of these provocative directors, we set out to theorize the dynamics of extreme watching that their films brought into play. The relationship set up between the spectator and the screen was central to our exploration of these films. As we noted in our introduction, “it is first and foremost the uncompromising and highly self-reflexive appeal to the spectator that marks out the specificity of these films for us,” as well as the “complex and often contradictory ways in which these films situate sex and violence as a means of interrogating the relationship between films and their spectators in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries” (1-2).

Extreme cinema has since evolved in a number of exciting directions, extending its cultural reach. As an indication of its cultural relevancy, for instance, the latest edition of the Oxford Dictionary of Film includes an entry on “extreme cinema (ordeal cinema),” which it defines as “a group of films that challenge codes of censorship and social mores, especially through explicit depiction of sex and violence, including rape and torture” (Kuhn and Westwell 152). The inclusion of the alternate term, “ordeal cinema,” is important for the emphasis it places on the role of the spectator, “who commits to watching a film that will take them through a horrendous experience in what seems like real time” (ibid).

As this dictionary entry suggests, such an extreme cinema tradition evokes a spectatorial dynamic that is central to a growing number of cinematic and national contexts. Taking a step back to encompass a more global view of cinema, it is clear that the new extremism tendency was never limited to European cinema, but has been a growing cinematic force across a number of national contexts, including films from South Korea, Japan, the United States, Mexico, and the Philippines, to name a few. It is no exaggeration to say that the notion of an extreme art cinema can feasibly be thought of not just as a transnational trend, but also as a highly lucrative global commodity, marketed to consumers in a range of different national contexts.

What happens to the specificity of the films of the new European extremism and their self-conscious address to the spectator when the category of extremism is opened up, and takes on global dimensions? To what extent is it useful or important to retain this label of a “new extremism” in cinema across these disparate contexts? And how do we account for the many-faceted contexts in which this idea of extreme cinema manifests itself? There is a need to tread carefully here, and it is now even more vital to acknowledge the different cultural, historical, and socio-economic contexts of extreme cinema; as Joan Hawkins warns, it is important not to “homogenize the traditions—as though all ‘visually arresting ways to turn violence into entertainment’ ultimately mean the same thing, or even have the same visceral effect” (n. pag.). This is something that we

1. See, for instance, Park Chan-Wook’s Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance (2002), Oldboy (2003), and Sympathy for Lady Vengeance (2005); Takashi Miike’s Audition (1999) and Ichi the Killer (2001); Kim Ki-Duk’s Address Unknown (2001); Carlos Reygadas’s Battle in Heaven (2005) and Post Tenebras Lux (2012); Harmony Korine’s Gummo (1997) and Trash Humpers (2009); and Brillante Mendoza’s Serbis (2008) and Kinatay (2009).
What happens to the specificity of the films of the new European extremism and their self-conscious address to the spectator when the category of extremism is opened up, and takes on global dimensions?

were mindful of in our book, noting the need to distinguish between the in-you-face bravado of a filmmaker like Gaspar Noé, and the more restrained, austere filmmaking style of Michael Haneke. Nevertheless, as the idea of extremism in cinema gains ever-greater currency in a global, transnational context, the critical work of parsing such distinctions is more relevant—and more necessary—than ever. Indeed, in addition to a focus on the different aesthetic valences of extreme filmmaking from diverse national contexts, we also need to take into consideration a number of factors, including the following: the ways in which “extreme” cinemas are marketed, distributed, and written about in both the national and international press, as well as in online fan forums; how the notions of extremism relate to technological innovation; how films mobilize a different range of affects and solicit distinct forms of emotional and cognitive work; how they admit of ambiguity and closure to varying degrees, they are addressed to different audience demographic, and operate according to their own distinctive narrative and genre paradigms, to produce dissimilar affective responses. Again, while recognizing affinities between films that seek to test the spectator’s merite through relentless exposure to graphic horror, it is vital to recognize, as Hawkins notes, that not all such ordeals will ultimately “mean the same thing” (n. pag.). A vital task here is to remain mindful of such distinctions, without lapsing into elitist arguments and perpetuating hierarchies between high and low, art house and mainstream cinema.

In light of these concerns, what is to be gained by casting the net a bit wider, to examine a collective body of films that share a desire to viscerally confront spectators? What can an expanded address to contemporary extremisms reveal about the terms of spectatorship today? Firstly, we believe that while it is important not to homogenize all traditions of extreme cinema, much can be gained through adopting a more comparative approach to thinking about global extremisms. Thinking about the distinctive treatments of the extreme within and across national boundaries can tell us much about the cultural contours that produce and lend value to spectatorial experiences, that make them meaningful and watchable. Secondly, we would argue along with Lowenstein that adopting a longer historical view in thinking about extreme cinema can bring to light insights about the imbrication of technology, embodiment, affect, and cultural expression as these evolve and reconfigure over time. Finally, thinking about both art house and mainstream extremisms together can help to avoid forming elitist judgments and hierarchies between “high” and “low” culture, highlighting the way the address to the extreme traverses cultures, periods, and styles. What makes this Cinephile issue on contemporary extremism so important, in the final analysis, is its careful interrogation of the parameters and the significance of extremism as a global, prototypical phenomenon, and the space that it makes available for us to reassess such extremisms in a critical, culturally specific, historically informed, and non-hierarchical way.

Work Cited


2. Comed by David Edelstein in 2006, the term “torture porn” has gained widespread currency to refer to a range of extreme horror films, including the Hostel (Eli Roth 2005) and Saw (James Wan 2004) franchises as well as films such as Wolf Creek (Gian Leo Muscat 2005), The Descent (Roger Kumble 2005), and A Serbian Film (Srdjan Spasojević 2010).

3. The new wave of French horror includes films such as Switchblade Romance (Alexander Aja 2003), Insulse (Alexander Bustillo and Julio Maury 2007), Frontier(s) (Olivier Corn 2007), The Ordal (Fabrice Du Welik 2004), and Martyrs (Pascal Laugier 2008).
Tim Palmer

Rites of Passing
Conceptual Nihilism in Jean-Paul Civeyrac’s Des filles en noir

One leading reason for contemporary French cinema’s rising profile is a group of films that together constitute a highly transgressive cinéma du corps/cinema of the body (Palmer, Brutal Intimacy 57-93). Figurehead productions, some disproportionately notorious, are films like Romance (Catherine Breillat 1999), Trouble Every Day (Claire Denis 2001), Irreversible (Gaspar Noé 2002), Demonlover (Olivier Assayas 2002), and Dans ma peau ([In My Skin] Marina de Van 2002); the tendency has more recently been extended by Enter the Void (Gaspar Noé 2009), La Sentiment de la chair ([The Sentiment of the Flesh] Roberto Garzelli 2010), and Hors Satan ([Outside Satan] Bruno Dumont 2011). This cinéma du corps consistently attracts scrutiny among—usually skeptical, often hostile—respondents for its stark treatment of sexual behaviours and corporeal processes, the blank or primitivist psychology of its unreadable protagonists, its recourse to abrupt and grisly violence, a proclivity for radical stylistic devices, and a lingering but never quite fully articulated sense of social despair. Undeniably these films do traffic in confrontational materials: rape, murder and assault, self-harm, carnivorous sex, bodily compulsions that are destructive and/or atavistic. In broader terms, moreover, part of the cinéma du corps’ extremist reputation comes from its categorical evasiveness, its refusal to shape its textual resources into either coherent socio-political interventions or horrific horror film norms. The films, by consequence, are indigestible, alienating both leftist/academic/socially polemical writers as well as populist/mainstream/genre aficionados.

My aim here is to nuance this cinéma du corps template by discussing a related fellow traveller case study, Jean-Paul Civeyrac’s Des filles en noir ([Young Girls in Black] 2010). Des filles en noir will let us explore the guiding principles that underpin much of the cinéma du corps, beyond the customary attention paid only to such films’ aggressively graphic content. Instead, I will represent Des filles en noir through its conceptual agenda, its cinematic engagements, its interactions with mainstays of recent French filmmaking. As such, both this film and the proximate cinéma du corps exist as a catalytic strand of cinematic practice, meticulous and oftentimes antagonistic within contemporary France’s ecosystem of film aesthetics, industry, and culture. By result, Civeyrac’s approach becomes thus: (1) to revive but inflect Impressionist theories of photogénie outlined by film writers and filmmakers in the late 1910s and 1920s; (2) to adopt but likewise strategically overturn (or cannibalize) French cinema’s conventional coming-of-age narratives, especially texts based upon the rites of passage of female adolescents; (3) to promulgate such techniques through pedagogical channels, crucially the film school circuit in Paris; and (4) to position the resulting product, through venues like the Cannes Film Festival, as a cutting-edge cultural asset in the competitive marketplace of French cinema. Related to these four points, in addition, this article seeks to boost the English-language profile of Civeyrac himself, an underregarded figure abroad, a lecturer-critic-filmmaker whose work recalls the similarly multi-faceted approach of 1920s icons such as Louis Delluc, Germaine Dulac, and Jean Epstein. What especially unites these figures is the formative notion of applied cinephilia, the shared belief that intensive, heightened critical film study—a fixation upon stylistic minutiae—should be vital not only for the writings of impassioned critics, but also, concomitantly, for making discoveries in cinematic expression to augment the work of progressive filmmakers (Palmer, Brutal Intimacy 195-215).

Like much of the cinéma du corps, Des filles en noir resonates with pent-up anger, corporeal and social estrangement. A brief preface opens the film, introducing Noémie (Elise Lhomen), a teenage girl in tears in her bedroom, reaching for a craft knife. After this suicide attempt fails,
she is left catatonic in a hospital room. Returned to school a year later, Noémie deepens her relationship—a passionate friendship that falls just short of sexual intimacy—with Priscilla (Léa Tissier). Dressed in black, the two girls are withdrawn pariahs. They reject their inconstant boyfriends, commit acts of vandalism, then fixate increasingly on self-murder, eventually announcing in a class presentation that they plan, like romantic artist Heinrich von Kleist, to end their lives. Soon after, talking on cellphones at dawn, both girls perch in high windows, encouraging each other to complete their suicide pact. Exchanging goodbyes, the girls profess their love. Shot from behind, Priscilla falls to her death, but at the last moment Noémie hesitates, screaming in grief and rage as she realizes her friend has gone. After a long fade-out to darkness, we next see Noémie institution- alized, in the throes of crippling self-recrimination. Time passes, and Noémie again takes up playing the flute; she joins an orchestra on tour but remains prone to debilitating depression. The film ends as Noémie, tormented by a pent-up anger, corporeal and social estrangement.

So bleak and potentially exploitative is this material that Civeyrac was obliged, like many of his cinéma du corps peers, to account for himself in interview and in public; the French film ecosystem demands professional rigor from its leading practitioners, especially when their work is combat alized, in the throes of crippling self-recrimination. Time passes, and Noémie again takes up playing the flute; she joins an orchestra on tour but remains prone to debilitating depression. The film ends as Noémie, tormented by a...
that juxtapose with her otherwise narcotized pacing. This young woman seems prematurely spent and contaminated by stress, a dynamic underpinning all of Des filles en noir’s diegetic world in heavy doldrums, an eerie external status in which internalized pain, festering, intermittently detonates. That classical cinematic fixture, the lucid and psychologically transparent goal-oriented protagonist, dissipates entirely here. Will Higbee, a representative objector to such cinéma du corps tactics, criticism this treatment as “auteurist evasions,” in which “deviant” behaviours are excised from any defined social context. Like many similar dissimilars, this interpretation rests on a restrictive, traditionalist notion that film art derives entirely from a political dichotomy: either

Civeyrac trains the viewer ... to scour the frame for microcurrents, tiny instances of photogenic that constitute the two girls’ course toward annihilation.

it is progressive (challenging the viewer in order to yield didactic leftist social diagnoses) or reactionary (beguiling the viewer in order to reinforce rightist social perspectives) (Higbee 326-327). Civeyrac’s protagonists, by contrast, embody no such obvious conclusions—rather they exhibit a numbed neutrality that masks their corporeal volatility and the twisted agency of their latent violence, a violence all the more disarming for its almost total lack of editorial context. Des filles en noir lyrically invokes, but does not descend to judge or explain.

Des filles en noir’s subversions also stem from a generative mechanism that is usually overlooked in film studies. This is the nature of filmmaking as a conversational practice, cinema craft as a means to engage with peers. Here, the cinéma du corps progresses not as a movement in the packaged sense of the nouvelle vague, but more as a shared, ongoing cinematic paradigm in flux. Hence arises, like many abiding interests of other cinéma du corps filmmakers, Civeyrac’s caution, frequently nihilistic interest in the inherited norms of contemporary French film culture. The template at hand is the feminine French adolescent coming-of-age text, frequently associated with women filmmakers, a paradigm traced by Carrie Tarr to the early 1970s, which explores “childhood and adolescence . . . [a] foregrounding of the perceptions of child or adolescent protagonists whose experiences are normally marginal and marginalized [that] has the potential to challenge hegemonic modes of seeing” (Tarr and Roller 25). This cycle, a feminine version of the so-called film d’ado, whose protagonists teeter on the brink of womanhood, originated on a mass scale with films such as Nina Compançon’s Fratricine et le bébé (1972), Liliane de Kermadec’s Aimais (1975), and Nelly Kaplan’s Nia (1976); it was then popularized further by Diane Kurys’s commercial crossover success, Diabolo Menthe (Uppermut Sode) (1977) (Palmer, “Women Filmmakers in France” 72). Catherine Breillat’s film Une Vrai jeune fille ([A Real Young Girl] 1976) made such materials far more sexually frank and explicit: it was produced in 1976 but only received distribution after the furor over Breillat’s similarly disparaging, and ultimately seminal, Romance in 1979. Since the 1970s, these rites-of-passage, female-centred productions have become a staple of French filmmaking; they constitute a large part of France’s cultural personality and contribution to world cinema, and are regularly affiliated with debutant filmmakers who annually create about forty percent of all French cinema (Palmer, Brutal Intimacy 15-56). Cinema itself, arguably, is a medium perfectly suited to the adolescent state of inherent neuroplasticity, the teenaged mind and body perpetually alive to new encounters, an aroused receptivity to sensual stimuli that lack prejudicial adult filtering.

Today, the female-focused coming-of-age template, in which girls precociously advance into adulthood, embattled but ultimately empowered, is a constant not only in French film production, but also in how that filmmaking is paradigmed into the global film festival circuit. In recent years, sample films, many of them domestic and international prizewinners, include Marjane Satrapi’s bande dessinée-inspired Persepolis (2007), Lola Doillon’s Et toi, t’es sur qui? (2007), Céline Sciamma’s A Real Young Girl, and the more commercially mainstream direction, Sophie Lelouch’s Paris-Manhattan (2012). These films are the back-drop, the stimulus, for much of Des filles en noir’s diegetic world. Whereas such films are seldom triumphalist, nor without melodrama, they do conventionally depict their young female protagonists evolving under duress into adults toughened by adversity—whether it is solitary pregnancy (La Brindille, 17 filles), political oppression (Persepolis), displaced or absent families (La Naissance des pieuvres), unexpected parental separation (Un Poison violent), or maternal death (Belle épine). Civeyrac counter-argues this paradigm into cinéma du corps entropy—Noémie and Priscilla’s coming-of-age trajectory unravel their adolescent rites of passage are not a transitory state, but a terminus. One iconic shot central to Des filles en noir—a reverse angle of the girls sitting, at night, on window ledges—makes the dichotomy overt: the set-up is reprised almost identically in 17 filles, but whereas that film uses it to show an abused, pregnant girl leaving her family home to escape and join her friends, suggesting tentative emancipation, Civeyrac shows it instead as the prelude to suicide (Priscilla) and institutionalization (Noémie).

More broadly, while the traditional film d’ado depicts feminine consolidations in the face of sociodominant pressures, Civeyrac displaces or else ambivalently notes such contexts to his doomed protagonists. The salient data, potential hinges to Noémie and Priscilla’s lives, are that in early 2010, as Des filles en noir went into production, France was enduring a twenty-three percent unemployment rate among fifteen to twenty-four year olds; in addition, by this time France had the third-highest suicide rate in Europe at 14.6 per 100,000 people, behind only Finland and Belgium, a crisis highlighted by the widely reported case of 24 mass suicides at France Télécom in late 2009 (INSEE 2010, Economist 2009). Civeyrac’s crucial inversion, however, is that his protagonists perceive adulthood, their future, to be compromised regardless of their success or failure. In one interrogation at school, Noémie gives her most devastating line, delivered impassively by Lhommeau like an aphorism: “Why study? To become unemployed? To be exploited? To exploit others?” To a classmate who attacks her admiration for the romantic suicide of Kleist, she deadpans: “Sure, you love life, it’s great. And your death will be great, after work, in front of the TV, with your fries and Coke.” Versus her mother, who apparently studies relentlessly to seek promotions in her career at a supermarket, Noémie reflects, “In the end, you’re exhausting yourself for how much more a month, three euros fifty?” To an aging, bedridden relative, the only person other than Priscilla who sparks Noémie’s solidarity and curiosity, she asks: “Aren’t you sick of it? It’s not a life.” Returning to Tarr’s initial claim, that French rites-of-passage films use the perspective of female adolescents to challenge hegemonic social discourse, Civeyrac takes this logic to an underrated but truistic conclusion: if the teenage years are really our most vital, so rife with experiential purity, then why continue further? If debilitation and banality configure adulthood, why persist? In pitiless contemporary form, Civeyrac implicitly returns us to Albert Camus’s famous 1942 formulation in The Myth of Sisyphus: “There is but one truly serious philosophical problem and that is suicide” (11). In this frame, Des filles en noir underlines how nothing nourishes the forever-restless Noémie and Priscilla: we never see them eat or drink (even during an extended dinner party set piece, another French film
... if the teenage years are really our most vivid, so rife with experiential purity, then why continue further? If debilitation and banality configure adulthood, why persist?

staple Civeyrac deconstructs); they are never in a state of repose or leisure; the latent sexuality of their intimacy never culminates (they are heterosexual yet shun boys for each other); and there are neither reliable males nor father figures present, no social safeguards to protect them from self-destruction. One key sequence, the two girls’ first extended conversation, presents this paradigm in a busy lunchtime café. As elsewhere, a suite of track-and-pan Steadicam glides (Michel Guillaud ascribes to such shots a “painful tender provocation: “She’s afraid to be alone”; “He’s only hitting them.” The disjunctions amplify through an ingeniously composed commentary: “He’s only hitting them,” a proximate cinémathèque du corps—another couple happily reunited, a businessman reading a paper, lunch orders issued—which juxtaposes with the girls’ sober but aghast response to the girls’ perspective as this army of drones going blindly about its business, an acquisitive and routinized existence from behind, tensed, standing in near darkness; next comes a close-up profile of her studying the ground far beneath her as tears fall from her face and sobs convulse her shoulders; cut, hours later, to the dim blue sky of dawn, and a tilt down to Noémie now slumped against the guardrail as early morning sounds (car engines, deliveries, passersby) float up from below; then we end on a frontal close-up of our protagonist’s exhausted but finally stillled facial features, her damp face, and the measured blinks of her eyes as her trauma seems to recede. This climactic passage, built around a crescendo of birds singing, revives poetically the famous moving-image centrepiece of Christ Marker’s La Fête (1963): its delicate study of a woman in intimate repose, her steady gaze representing a symbolic port in a storm, a repository for human endurance or even beauteous empathy in the midst of ubiquitous suffering and calamity. Civeyrac’s finale, a cinematic tapestry of the face, inspired Serge Kangas, following Des filles en noir’s Directors Fortnight premiere at the 2010 Cannes Film Festival, to pay tribute to the director as “one of our best active cineastes . . . [a filmmaker] fascinated by the beauty of a shunt, the fleeting play of a face, the restoration of dawn . . . [with] a grace and intensity that is absolutely stupefying” (71). Such is the status of Des filles en noir—and the cinéma du corps with which it is engaged—as a distillation of much of what is admirable about the contemporary French film ecosystem. Modeled by Civeyrac, these are filmmakers that inventively mine film history and pedagogy by conflating film study with film practice, carrying on a cinematic conversation that somehow disregses lyrically affective fragments within some of the most uncompromisingly stark works in contemporary world cinema.

Works Cited

Kiva Reardon

Subject Slaughter

Ideally, these should be read simultaneously. Though just as we cannot live being both consciously aware of our interiority and exte-
riority—that is, aware of the material functionality of our bodies while perceptually inhabiting and understanding the world—the best approach is to read the texts as closely together as possible, paragraph by paragraph, as neither comes before the other. The texts coexist, and the aim is to enfold the text itself, to create the conditions in which "the inclusion (or occlusion, inocclusive invagina-
tion) is interminable" (Derrida 70).

The reading process will not be fluid, nor should it be. The awareness of the limits of the text—the "edges" (63) and "coiling" (68)—should invoke a plunge into the text's three-dimensionality, a space that our material bodies inhabit. This depth, however, is not comforting. The tension between the texts, the penetration and loss of their boundaries in moving from one to the other, should, at when we become aware of our material bodies in their involuntary and uncanny palpitations, cause moments of rupture. In those bursts there lingers a sense of the erotic and desire: the intertwined texts are at play with each other as the end point remains elusive.

Returning to Derrida, here we will turn his impulse on its head. Where he asked: "What will I ask of La Folie du jour?" (66), here we ask: "What will Inside asks of us?" There can only be one answer, which comes from Georges Bataille: "Clearly consciousness is the only issue. This book [The Tears of Eros], for its author, has only one meaning: it opens up consciousness of the self!" (142)

In "The Expanded Gaze in Contracted Space" Vivian Sob-
chack notes that despite the fact that "we are thrown into the material world... we are surprised again and again by the radical contingency and vulnerability of our flesh" (86). Given this, we "would like to forget this fact of existence" (ibid) and therein forget our bodies—in other words, repress them. Though the common conception of the unconscious is to hold it as immaterial in the Freudian sense, we may also think of our lived bodies as such, in that we become conscious of them in slips (with the pain of a fall or an involuntary twitch). Thus, just as Freud claimed we repress our desires in order to participate in (and indeed propagate) civilization, we repress the materiality of our bodies in order to function and maintain a sense of unified self.

These implications create what Sobchack argues is a frac-
tured gaze (and most importantly for the paper at hand, what can also be considered a fractured subject), where "logical contingency" (the materially vulnerable body) is at play with the "emotional turbulence" of the subject "thrown by their material existence" (ibid). Our gaze is then split between the "irrational effects" of living—the physical

We start inside. A space with no form.

In.

Within.

Contained by.

Surrounded by.

How to understand the formless space that engulfs us other than by deferring to words to give shape to the unknown?

"I have for some time now already been noting down the words that I would suggest to you," wrote Bataille (Tears 10). Yet the words themselves give no sense of spatial orien-
tation, meaning or shape of what is around us.

It is here where À l’intérieur (Alexandre Bustillo and Julien Maury 2007) begins. Credits roll over red fluids, over in-
determinate surfaces, which are at once familiar and strange: Muscles! Organs! The opening places us in a liminal space,
vulnerability of our bodies—and the “irrational affects” of realizing we exist in an unstable world (ibid). This is, for Sobchack, “the specificity of human existence” (ibid) and, additionally, “essentially humanist” (108). Yet, while Sobchack holds irrational affect and emotional turbulence as “two sides of the same existential coin” (87) we might also see such an understanding of subjectivity as one that fundamentally challenges, and destroys, the very root of humanism and existentialism: the subject itself.

To build on the analogy of the existential coin, while Sobchack sees it endlessly flipping in space, ceaselessly rotating between the two sides, we might ask what would happen if the coin landed “irrational affects” side up: what happens to the subject when repeatedly faced with the realization that life is predicated upon a materially fragile and flawed body, rupturing a unified sense of self? Such a proposition turns us away from Sobchack and towards Georges Bataille, whose essays not only posed this very question but whose novels sought to effect such reactions. Writing on a radical notion of the material subject in the “Big Toe,” he notes humanity’s “hatred of the still painfully perceptible frenzy of the bloody palpitations of the body [as] in an willingly imagines himself to be like the God Neptunе” (22). The moments when our bodies assert themselves through these involvements become, as it were, material Freudian slips as we become conscious of our lived bodies. For Bataille, it is this knowledge gained through experience rather than rational thought that foregrounds his notion of the material (Noyes 499), but also the fantasy of materiality, base materialism not only shatters hierarchies of the body and ourselves. We wander and spiral in the form of consciousness as we become fixated on under-studying the rapid dart of the eye muscles, the processing of light on the retina, the inner workings of a body. It is at these moments when we understand the vast gap between the body and ourselves. We wander and spiral in the formless present . . .

What does the inside of an eye look like? What does it feel like?
How can I know what I cannot touch?
How can I know what I cannot see?
There is no part of the body that cannot be broken, mutilated, torn, penetrated, or violated.

The body is not only the place of pleasure but also of pain. Though you can punch a shoulder, you can also massage it; you can stomp on a foot but also tickle it.

The eye’s pleasure possibility is not found in physical contact as the eye surface, unlike the rest of the body, always recoils from touch.

As we spiral we lose a sense of form, both of the tactile world and language. Eye becomes *o-e*, without linear cohesive meaning as we focus on its task (“Formless” 27)—to see—which locates us in the panicked formless present.

“We start inside another’s body, growing into a being in a place that we never know yet once inhabited: a place we will never see, never know. The place that as living beings we remain tied to—the biological point of origin—but that remains perpetually elusive. We bear the mark of this connection on our bodies (the belly button) but have no memory of it as it is a place before memory, before the brain, before formation of the subject. What was it like to be born? The universally shared experience that no one recalls. Exists beyond it. Like death.

This is the fascination with the maternal body in that it is both elemental and elementary:

What was it like to be born?
I want to know where and what I once was.
But cannot.

The pleasure possibility is not found in a physical contact as the eye’s surface, unlike the rest of the body, always recoils from touch. It is in this gesture that we find ourselves again. There was I there. I am. Relocated.

In a 2004 essay for *ArtForum* James Quandt coined the term “New French Extremity” discussing “the growing vogue for shock tactics in French cinema over the past decade” (n. pag.). Giving an overview of the films to date, Quandt’s argument (or rather lament) centres on the perceived fall of Bruno Dumont into NFE, a class of film that “proliferates in the high-art environs of a national cinema whose provocations have historically been formal, political, or philosophical. . . . or, at their most immediate. . . at least assumingly as emanations of an artistic movement (Surrealism mostly)” (ibid). Despite noting the similarities that NFE shares with figures and films from the Surrealist movement (such as Bataille and *Le Sang des bêtes*), Quandt is adamantly opposed to seeing these relationships with NFE as anything more than superficial, summarizing them as “aggressiveness that is really a grandiose form of passivity” (ibid). For him this is rooted in the fact that “the recent provocateurs are too disparate in purpose and vision to be classified as a movement” (ibid). Instead, NFE is reduced to a trend, a lowly term that suggests superficiality and a fleeting impact. The result of this is that the films are therefore treated as subpar, released on genre distribution labels (such as the case with *À l’intérieur* on Dimension Extreme), and, when and if they are released, require prefaces such as this as they are considered to be succumbing to the elementary—this is the worst aspect—and the elemental” (ibid). While Quandt is correct in noting the disparate forms NFE has taken, this need not be considered a fault. Indeed, it may be incredibly liberating as it presumes no essential idea of either Surrealism or NFE and allows for analysis of specific texts rather than arguing all must be “assemblable.” This paper will thus work within a Bataillian form of Surrealism to suggest a generative discussion of the subject—hood is at play, a credo that, whatever Quandt may not agree, it fundamentally deserves. Our establishment is shot inside the body: a fetus floating in amniotic fluid. Suddenly the fetus jerks violently, slamming (against what?) as blood obscures the screen, our vision. We are wrenched out of the body, into the world, dislocated at the site of an accident: two cars, blood, bodies.

Where am I? Faces obscured by blood; who is that? Cutting inside the car the camera pans down over a woman stroking her pregnant belly. It is in this gesture that we find ourselves again. There was I there. I am. Relocated.

The body’s nervous system is a two-directional highway between pleasure and pain, but this does not apply to the eye.

The eye cannot be caressed, held, or stroked. Relocated.
This relocation, however, is less than reassuring for it returns us to the uncanny place of the womb. Located in a place that we do not know. Relocation in the text is thus yet another layer of disorientation.

I cannot know where I am.

It is this question of location—"Where am I?" instead of "Who am I?" (Kristeva) —around which we may frame Julia Kristeva’s notion of the abject. The abject is not merely an object but “is radically excluded and drawn [as] towards the place where meaning collapses” (2). It is thus a spatially disorienting effect that is “never one nor homogenous, nor totalizing, but essentially divisible, foldable and catastrophic” (8). This is first enacted in the credit sequence of À l’intérieur, bloody, fluid surfaces that suddenly become a mass (evoking a surprising and disorienting depth of undulating tissue-like substance. It is familiar, but a familiarity that is never tactically known as we cannot look inside our own bodies (at least not without consequences). We cannot know the womb: a space that for one gender is a part of us, and for both genders once contained us. This is central to Freud’s notion of the uncanny, as the place of no return and “that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar” (220); however, our bodies’ interiority (and especially the womb) function differently in that they are never tactically known but at the same time are materially present and physically a part of us. For this reason, À l’intérieur approaches something closer to Kristeva’s work on the abject: “Essentially different from ‘uncanniness,’ more violent, too, abjection is elaborated through a failure to recognize its kin: nothing is familiar, not even a shadow of a memory” (5). Our interiors may then be “a deep well of memory” (6) but it is memory without out content that threatens the fantasy that we have mastery over ourselves.

Rupturing this fantasy is what is at stake in “The Big Toe,” through which notions of “base materialism” shall be examined. In claiming “the big toe is the most human part through which notions of “base materialism” shall be expelled” (2), Bataille’s novels, such as The Story of the Eye, are located in a place that I do not know. My relocation in the text is another layer of disorientation.

This is the first horror.

The horror of the inside.

I realize I am positioned with a nonentity, a being becoming. Here I am located within a process of formation, of a being not entered into a world of language, into the Name of the Father, not unified. My identification here places me outside of these constructions as well. The realization of finding oneself outside of language that is one of both radical freedom and vulnerability.

This is the second horror.

The horror of formless space.

It is here the film shifts, or rather begins.

We are sutured into the text through narrative exposition, as we learn the body that we were inside of is Sarah’s. At nine months pregnant, if she does not go into labour in the next 24 hours she will be medically induced the following day, Christmas. Here we begin to understand Sarah’s body from the outside. At her ultrasound the cold jelly applied to her distended belly (impossibly swollen with her child and [un]naturally grotesque) sends fissions across our own skin. This we can understand, this we can touch.

Sarah’s body at first seems comprehensible, if only in that it is formed and complete. Here is a body located in material space, formed, narrativized. And yet, her body is one that remains uncanny, always reminding us of the inside. The visual presence of her belly constantly indexes something within. We cannot escape the inside.

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The body within becoming the bodies without.

Sarah’s body becomes a bearer of asemiotic meaning that conflates contradictory impulses and associations as we move from thinking of sensual sex, to reproductive sex, the pleasurably penetrated vagina to the productive one, ripped and torn during birth. Labour is and as labour. For the pregnant body is one that has already been penetrated towards an end: a child. Thus, it is a body that marks not sensual desire and eroticism but work, and no longer “the moment of sensual union with a mother, in which the child as an extension of the mother is itself extended in the sphere of the sexual union” (8). This is found in observing the last instant then, the fantasy and desire of control is finally shattered in the realization that to wish for this is to desire death. The closest we come to this in lived experience is encountering the material body under duress, of which the horror without limits” (20).

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I cannot know where I am.
Unlike other images of torture throughout the film, this moment approaches what Bataille reads upon the face of Fou-Tchou-Li, who after being convicted of murder is sentenced to execution via torture, cut to pieces while still alive: “the ecstatic appearance of the victim’s expression” an “image of pain, at once ecstatic[,] and intolerable” (Tears 204, 206). In this image Bataille encounters a last instant, the threshold about to be crossed, which is similarly found in Sarah’s screams. These encounters, however, create a tear—both a fornical rupturing and the watery ocular fluid—in the question of the erotic. The moment of cutting the fetus from the stomach is one that is lost in excess, frenzy, and the melding of both life and death. If, as Bataille claims, “eroticism is by all accounts linked to birth, to a reproduction that endlessly repairs the ravages of death” (Tears 33), here we encounter this very fact: the dying maternal erotic body. Thus, while Kristeva reads the abject as ecstatic in an “attempt [by the subject] at stopping the hemorrhage” (55), here we are confronted with that which is closer to what Bataille calls giving over to the “the blind instincts of the organs” (Tears 45). Our organs, our base mate-

realism, are rooted in a “calculation of pleasure” (ibid): located in her vengeance, and for Our pleasure, however, is compli-

ded. We realize devotees to the “devotees of the abject . . . do not and terrifying, nourishing, and ject inside of the maternal body” ic desire in À l’intérieur is not that when faced with the inside of this way. This is the moment of little

ment—which is located outside of in the Lacanian sense to be what

n-d-a-p-a-c-e-o-w re we are then the abject are not shot but ar. Me. (cry). The final shot, a single frame on The Woman’s disfigured her arms, reveals her to be sitting in the opening sequence, we are again familiar (it must be Sarah’s living over, we are once again located in a

connection and rupture here it is punctured again then there is the cut the methodical up and down of the scissors as they work through the flesh as it gets thicker away from the centre deeper cuts now we see it don’t cut away let me see what it looks inside as it opens make space where there should be none let me see

earlier on there was a moment of sinking dread as The Woman picked up the scissors and walked into the bedroom since then the scissors have haunted the film hovering in the background of every scene waiting to reappear they do again puncturing her hand pinning it to the wall but so far the tools have not been used for their real purpose to make spaces holes gaps where there are none where there should be none this time they are waded as they are meant to be held properly the first cut is the worst into the belly button the permanent maker of maternal connection a mark of connection and rupture here it is punctured again then there is the cut the methodical up and down of the scissors as they work through the flesh as it gets thicker away from the centre deeper cuts now we see it don’t cut away let me see what it looks inside as it opens make space where there should be none let me see

Where am I?

Alive.
Andrea Butler

Sacrificing the Real
Early 20th Century Theatrics and the New Extremism in Cinema

While violent images permeate contemporary society, the practice of presenting real violence as entertainment is taboo and rests at the margins of culture. Forms of real violence such as public executions and ritual sacrifices are no longer commonly practiced in most regions of the world, but the cultural desire for violent spectacle does not abate with the decline of violent public performances. In his reworking of Aristotelian catharsis in relation to ancient ritual sacrifice and the modern stage/screen, Mark Pizzato argues that “the performance of violence, from ancient ritual to screen sacrifices today, gives context and sense to the losses of life, gradual or sudden, in each spectator’s particular death drive” (2). He notes that theatre has a long history of simulating traumatic events for the purpose of entertainment and instruction because viewing simulated violence can curb the desire to repeat real sacrifices offstage. While this may seem a simplistic explanation for our society’s thirst for realistic depictions of extreme sex and violence, there is something to be said for its transparency. The rapid development of technology and the proliferation of images that arise from the human desire to experience extreme imagery push filmmakers into making bold and innovative choices. In order for something new to materialize, however, it must emerge from past traditions, and by acknowledging past influences, new spectacles of violence can be viewed as part of the evolution of artistic transgression.

Old and New

The cultural desire to see images of extreme brutality has evolved alongside the development of technology in filmmaking. Through the manipulation of special effects, films can simulate reality like never before. Some filmmakers have chosen to capitalize off of society’s ravenous desire for violent spectacle, and so they present the human psyche and body in all states of perversion and depravity. Such is the methodology of new extremism: whether the intentions of the filmmakers are ultimately critical or exploitative, they address and interrogate the spectator’s desire to consume extreme depictions of violence. As suggested by Tanya Horeck and Tina Kendall, “by pushing at the limits of the watchable and the tolerable, these films involve and implicate spectators in particularly intensified ways with what is shown on screen, demanding critical interrogation and ethical and affective response” (8). While the new extremism of the twenty-first century is aggressive, confrontational, and ethically challenging for its viewers, the pushing of boundaries in violent performance for the purpose of affective involvement is by no means a new phenomenon in entertainment.

New extremism’s French origins can be traced back through a long history of violent theatrical performance. The French theatre of terror, the Grand Guignol, reigned in popularity during its lifespan from 1897-1962 in Pigalle, Paris. Its popularity was rooted in tales of the perverse and the depraved. Horeck and Kendall note that new extremism “reflects [a] bridging position between newness and indebtedness to the past, to a history of transgression and provocation that is renewed and given visceral immediacy for the present” (5-6). The Grand Guignol was known for its theatrically explicit portrayals of gore, death, and sex, and was an exclusive form of entertainment that remained untouched by the cinematic medium for many years. For various reasons (including censorship and technological limitations), film was unable to express the levels of depravity that were achievable in the theatre. It was not until the rise of Hammer Films in the postwar period, in combination with the appearance of human monsters onscreen (Psycho [Alfred Hitchcock 1960], Peeping Tom [Michael Powell...
films of the twenty-first century. All of these films focus their energies on appealing to the base of emotions in order to affect the audience on a visceral level. Of the Grand Guignol, Mel Gordon, one of the few scholars that writes on the topic, comments: "Here was a theatre genre that was predicated on the stimulation of the rawest and most adolescent of human interactions and desires: incest and patricide; bloodlust; sexual anxiety and conflict; morbid fascination with bodily mutilation and death; loathing of authority; fear of insanity; an overall disgust for the human condition and its imperfect institutions. (2) The same argument can be made for the horror genre, and more recently, new extremism, which has simulated all of the 'most adolescent of human interactions' listed above, and more. The taboo is desirable entertainment precisely because it is taboo.

While new extremist films reflect the culture and the era in which they have been produced, they also rely heavily on the foundations from which they have been built. An in-depth examination of the techniques and tropes of extreme performance can illuminate how new extremism's roots in the Theatre of the Grand Guignol can be contextualized within the larger realm of simulated violence for the sake of catharsis and entertainment. With the onset of modern technologies, depictions of gore and explicit violence simulate reality with detailed accuracy, blending practical and computer-generated effects. These new technologies saturate the desire for Horeck and Kendall’s “newness” while allowing for the aforementioned “purification of fear and pity” that Gordon identifies as the main purpose of the Grand Guignol.

Simulated Violence, Real Affect

Images of real violence, such as in news stories and documentaries, can be accessed from a multitude of platforms, including print, television, film, smart phones, and personal computing devices. We consult these same platforms to experience fictional images of sex and violence intended for entertainment purposes. While certain filmmakers portray fictional violence in an exaggerated fashion and therefore do not concern themselves with the depiction of realism, others rely upon it heavily in hopes of allowing audiences to fully immerse themselves in the situations presented in the film. In Amos Vogel’s examination of film as subversive art, he suggests that the “viewer enters the theatre willingly, if not eagerly, ready for surrender... [and] the film experience is total, isolating, hallucinatory” (9). In other words, audience members suspend their disbelief knowingly. While representations of violence are not real, they are still accepted as such because of the audience’s desire to be impacted on a visceral level. Vogel notes that man begins with what he sees, progressing to visual representations of reality. Their transmutation into art does not seem to diminish the images’ impact. As holy today as in man’s pre-history, the image is accepted as if it were life, reality, truth. It is accepted on a feeling—rather than mind—level. (11)

Even though the audiences of violent performance are intellectually aware that the images they perceive are not real, this does not negate their affective response to those images.

Curiously, when experiencing an actual traumatic event first-hand, we tend to use fictional metaphors rooted in cinematic images to describe it. In Susan Sontag’s Regarding the Pain of Others, she comments that the survivors of 9/11 described the event as “surreal” and “like a movie” (22). We can assume that most of the individuals involved had never experienced such terror and extreme violence apart from witnessing it on a movie screen. This explains why, when attempting to describe the experience, individuals relied heavily upon metaphor: the pain and suffering of a horrific experience can be contextualized through past images of fictional violence because language in itself is inadequate as a descriptor. Elaine Scarry’s examination of the Body in Pain addresses this inadequacy: “Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language has learned language” (18). What is older than language, which means that language is unnecessary to experience pain. It can also be argued that, “in man’s evolution, images antedate words and thought, thus reaching deeper, older, more basic layers of the self” (Vogel 11). Pain and suffering are primordial and cannot be adequately described through words, suggesting that images, which are our earliest forms of storytelling and communication, may provide a language that is better suited to representing pain.

If one is unable to rely upon words to describe the experience of fictional images of sex and violence, simulated violence can act as the replacement to what is otherwise unrepresentable through language. This leads Pizzato to suggest that “the current rites of our mass theatrical media [are] masking Real sacrifices as mere play” (178). It is safe to assume that most spectators do not wish to experience real pain and suffering, nor do they necessarily want to revel in the real pain of others. The only way to experience pain and suffering safely is through the consumption of fictionalized violence. That being said, the presentation of “Real sacrifices as mere play” may lead to difficulties discerning real violence from simulated imagery. Without a basis of comparison, the spectator confronted with real violence instantly catalogues that image within a growing vault of images of realistically simulated violence. As a result of this blurring between fiction and reality, real images of violence are questioned regularly for their authenticity. Luka Magnotta, who this past summer in Montreal mutilated and dismembered Concordia student Lin Jun, uploaded the murder and dismemberment onto an online gore website only to be critiqued by the site’s followers, who suspected the video to be fake. If audiences have no real-life comparisons to draw upon, fictional images act as stand-ins for real ones. Because simulated images have become our primary frame of reference regarding real pain and suffering, our consumption of these images serves the purpose of allowing us to explore our own attitudes and fears concerning pain and violence.

New Extremism and the Grand Guignol

While Pizzato examines ritual sacrifice in relation to theatrical performance, he does not stray far from the theatre of the ancients, leaving out some of the most perversive simulations of sex and violence to be found at the turn of the twentieth century. Gordon notes that the Grand Guignol is not a model that has ever existed: “The impulse to shock, to display the extremes of human behavior, and then to demonstrate the divine punishments that follow for those individuals who violate society’s taboos may have been the original social function of all performance” (4). Just as Pizzato speaks of the violent theatrical performance of ancient Greek, Aztec, and Roman cultures as a replacement for real sacrifice, Gordon aligns the Grand Guignol with those same theatrics of “purification and fear,” through which spectators can safely experience the purpose of allowing us to explore our own attitudes and fears concerning pain and violence.
Both the Grand Guignol and the new extremist films were key to realism in Grand Guignol. It was imperative for successful viewing that the spectators suspend their disbelief and willing participant intensified the spectator's role as both witness and willing participant intensified the spectator's role as both witness and willing participant. In the same way that new extremism is known for its unpredictable reception trajectory, the early theatre owners of the Grand Guignol emphasized stories of sensitive spectators, that the spectator has encountered. Being that the stage was restrictive in size, the claustrophobic nature of the settings (prison cells, lighthouse towers, doctor's offices, bedrooms) combined with the lifelike storylines provoked an immersive experience and a heightened affective response. The intimate setting brought attention to the staging and special effects, which were crucial aspects of the realistic mode of performance. In their comprehensive study on the Grand Guignol, Richard J. Hand and Michael Wilson note, “the creative core of the Grand-Guignol is such that the effective execution of horror, through a heady blend of anticipation and suggestion, allows the audience to see, or at least believe it has seen, what it clearly has not” (76). Due to technological limitations, the Grand Guignol often had to imply violence while maintaining the same visceral impact for spectators. The prosenium stage allowed for many of the gory acts to be committed offstage, heard rather than seen by the audience. In instances when violence did happen onstage, careful blocking and slight of hand were used to avoid revealing the illusion. Sheep's testicles and blood-filled condoms were used for onstage castrations; real animal eyeballs were used for eye-gouging (because of their ability to bounce on the floor so well); retractable knives and fake blood (four different recipes were patented) were everywhere. This was all part of a regular night at the Grand Guignol. The blocking of actors was rehearsed repeatedly in order to ensure that the onstage trickery was pulled off without any problems because, as Paula Mata, the most murdered and raped woman of the Grand Guignol (murdered over 10,000 times and raped over 3,000), has said, “a line or gesture said too fast, or too slow, could easily ruin the tension built up over ten to fifteen minutes and destroy the evening.” (Gordon 26). While the theatre situated itself within the naturalist tradition, using realistic props, special effects, and storylines at moments when the four-walled naturalism was broken (usually by the villain looking directly at the audience just prior to the moment of violence), the spectator’s role as both witness and willing participant intensified the horror, and heightened affective response.

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New extremism does not have to break the fourth wall in order to move its audience, but it does employ up-to-date film technologies to garner the same participatory response in the spectator. Violence and its effects are seen up close and in graphic detail. The close-up shot (Antichrist [Lars von Trier 2009]), the extreme long take (Irreversible [Gaspar Noé 2002]), and the employment of subjective point-of-view shots (Danea ma Pauv [Marina de Van 2002]) are all used as a means of intensifying horror while inviting the spectator to become an active participant. No longer must the viscera be implied or hinted at. With the aid of modern technology, explicitness—aided by the use of colour, creative camerawork, and stylistic vibrancy—has become the new standard when it comes to extremist content. Particular moments of extreme violence may still remain hidden, but no longer is this out of technical necessity; technology grants new extremism the ability to show it all, which intensifies the affective experience, similar to how the Grand Guignol incited participatory feelings through convincing onstage violence.

New extremism may be new in that the representations of violence have become more realistic, but that does not mean that the desire to explore extreme and violent content through performance is a fad that will abate over time. Extremism in art, particularly of the realistic kind discussed herein, evolves along with everything else. Transgressive simulations of violence have developed alongside the modernization of technologies, which has resulted in new standards when it comes to filmic realism. While public executions may be a thing of the past, images of simulated horrors find their place in the repository of fictional images of violence within us all. New extremism allows spectators to remain safely distanced from the content embedded within the films while testing out their tolerance for extreme subject matter, and it calls upon the past in order to assert itself in the modern age. Times change and the execution of art evolves, but our basic human instincts remain unaltered; we will always be drawn to the depraved, the transgressive, and the taboo.

**Works Cited**


**Final Thoughts**

New extremism may be new in that the representations of violence have become more realistic, but that does not mean that the desire to explore extreme and violent content through performance is a fad that will abate over time. Extremism in art, particularly of the realistic kind discussed herein, evolves along with everything else. Transgressive simulations of violence have developed alongside the modernization of technologies, which has resulted in new standards when it comes to filmic realism. While public executions may be a thing of the past, images of simulated horrors find their place in the repository of fictional images of violence within us all. New extremism allows spectators to remain safely distanced from the content embedded within the films while testing out their tolerance for extreme subject matter, and it calls upon the past in order to assert itself in the modern age. Times change and the execution of art evolves, but our basic human instincts remain unaltered; we will always be drawn to the depraved, the transgressive, and the taboo.
Cinematography and Sensorial Assault in Gaspar Noé’s *Irreversible*

This article will focus on the aesthetic element of cinematography in Gaspar Noé’s 2002 film *Irreversible*, and its function of affecting the spectator on a physiological and psychological level. The methodology used for this purpose posits aesthetics as a confrontation with the spectator, and studies the resulting direct physiological and psychological modulations. I wish to move away from what Herbert Zettl terms “applied media aesthetics,” in which media elements “clarify, intensify, and interpret events for a large audience” (14). Instead, this article will approach formalist studies of cinema from a more radical direction: the field of “haptic cinema,” a model for theories of spectator affect. While the concept of haptics, derived from the Greek verb “haptesthai” meaning “to touch” (“Haptics”), is discussed in a range of fields (mechanical engineering, psychology, literature), I propose that its significance in cinema must be examined more closely; as my frame of reference I will use Laura Marks’s extensive research into the subject, in which she posits the image as evoking the sensation of touch within the viewer (162). No longer the codifier of a set of ideas or feelings, the image becomes the feeling in this approach, and instead of establishing a connection between aesthetics and content, the viewer receives the image on a purely visceral level.

One aspect to be specifically examined is the relation between camera movement and induced kinetosis—more commonly referred to as motion sickness or, more precisely for my purposes herein, visually induced motion sickness (VIMS), a by-product of exposure to optical depictions of inertial motion (Bardy et al. 1). In *Irreversible*, specifically, the cinematography conducts a visceral attack on the viewer, ultimately eliciting adverse physical sensations. I suggest that the film establishes what I define as a certain “in-the-body-ness” between the viewer and the characters—essentially, the degree to which the viewer is placed into the shoes of the film’s characters. This in-the-body-ness secures the place of *Irreversible* in Tim Palmer’s *cinéma du corps*, “a spate of recent French films that deal frankly and graphically with the body, and corporeal transgressions . . . whose basic agenda is an on-screen interrogation of physicality in brutally intimate terms” (57).

This visceral assault is first experienced during the Rectum nightclub sequence, filmed (like every other sequence in *Irreversible*) in one take. Here, the camera spins and swirls through the claustrophobic interior, its movement significantly different from that of the party scene, which is lighter in tone and features more structured camerawork, further emphasized by brighter and more diffuse lighting. While a tracking shot is often used in order to help the viewer better understand the camera’s surroundings, thus acting as a point of navigation and allowing an unmediated view of the characters’ surroundings (e.g. the “Copacabana” shot in Martin Scorsese’s *Goodfellas* [1990], or the many tracking shots around the high school in Gus Van Sant’s *Eloise* [2003]), *Irreversible* celebrates its usage to the complete opposite effect as we follow Pierre (Albert Dupontel) and Marcus (Vincent Cassel) through the dungeon-like corridors of the Rectum nightclub. Here, the tracking shot deliberately disorients, nauseates, and confuses the viewer, aiming to subvert the very function of classical cinematography: it does not simply follow a track, pacing itself through the world, granting the frame a degree of stability that entails complete knowledge and understanding of the world through the screen. Palmer describes the camerawork as a result of Noé’s decision to use an extremely small, lightweight Minima camera in order to film a 360-degree area of space around the characters of Pierre and Marcus (76). He discusses the cinematography with descriptors such as “violently” and “jarring,” reinforcing the popular idea that Noé tends to punish the viewer.

The result is a complete loss of control—not only for the camera, nor for Pierre and Marcus, but most significantly, for the viewer. The classical ideals of cinematography are dismantled to mirror the alienation and stupefaction Pierre and Marcus experience inside a space that is completely alien to them. As one critic notes, the camerawork...
establishes that “nothing makes sense, nothing is in focus, reality is scraps of information that refuse to assemble into a pattern” (Hunter n. pag.). Furthermore, these adverse feelings are transmitted to the viewer in order to establish that in-the-body-ness with the male pair: the viewer, too, gets lost in the world of the nightclub, and subsequently experiences similar feelings of dislocation and isolation. The concept of defamiliarization comes around full circle upon the sequence’s final shot. After watching Pierre and Marcus fatally beat the man they believe to be Alex’s (Monica Bellucci) rapist, Le Ténia (Jo Prestia), we soon discover their mistake: the man they killed was not the rapist at all, and Le Ténia merely watches the murder incredulously, with a sadistic sense of satisfaction. Only with the benefit of omniscience can the viewer understand the tragic error, something Pierre and Marcus may be doomed to never see. 

The disorientation induced in the viewer by the camera movement is paralleled in the quest of the two men who are similarly lost in an unfamiliar world, only to result in fatal consequences.

While it is important to note the effects that we, as spectators, may feel while viewing the events as they unfold, I wish to continue supporting my initial hypothesis that Noé’s film exploits spectator affect through the sensation of touch with evidence from research into the area of human sensation and perception. While there has yet to be a consensus among researchers on the factors leading to motion sickness, the sensory conflict theory has been central to an understanding of VIMS for over two decades. Writing on the topic of motion sickness, J.J. Brand and James Reason argue that “the essential nature of the provocative stimulus is that it always involves a mismatch between present sensory input and stored traces of previous information” (103). Situations, then, that elicit motion sickness would be elicited, suggesting that, while watching Cloverfield, “viewers were sitting still in their seats, so their inner ear was telling their body they were motionless. But the bumpy camera movements—and their eyes—mised them into thinking they were moving around erratically” (Smith n. pag.). These conflicting messages then bring about symptoms of motion sickness, such as nausea and headache. The degree of subjectivity is central in eliciting this effect: a film that posits the spectator as an objective witness removed from the content onscreen will likely not result in motion sickness, as it follows the traditional norms of cinematography—such as logical uses of long, medium, and close shots to establish the world and its inhabitants clearly. Contrastingly, a film that attempts to place the spectator within the film must often do so through either a subjective point of view (as evidenced in Cloverfield’s filmed-through-a-character-camera verisimilitude) or, as in the case of Irreversible, a form of indirect subjectivity: not witnessing the action through a character’s direct point of view, but allowing us to become close enough to the action that we are able to experience the characters’ emotions as if we were right there with them (Boggs 132). In our example here, the camera does not literally become the point of view of Pierre or Marcus, or perhaps any Rectum inhabitant, but successfully emulates their states of mind through movements that blatantly violate any traditional cinematographic norm. In so doing, the camera lens transforms into a human eye, emulating the spontaneity and uncertainty with which we view the world, no different from the uncertainty Marcus and Pierre feel in the hostile, claustrophobic nightclub.

It can therefore be suggested that Noé treats the haptic through cinematography, which, as exemplified by the VIMS induced by the Rectum sequence, can affect the spectator on a physiological level.1 Going back to Mark’s initial conception of the haptic, we can see how Noé erases the representational power of the image and privileges its material presence instead. The image is not constructed for contemplation and interpretation by the spectator, but instead reveals reality: the notion of “construction” is dismantled for pure feeling on a physiological level, exemplifying

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1. It should be noted that this remains a hypothesis, and one in need of further empirical research. It is also worth considering viewers who did not experience nausea or uncomfortable feelings of any sort during the viewing.
similar to the fire extinguisher scene, the spectator identifies with the victim not through mere representation, but direct affect.

It is this violent method with which Noé establishes the in-the-body-ness between the viewer and the character—in this case, the man being beaten. The concept of duration forces the viewer to acknowledge his/her own cognizance: the duration of the murder correlates to the duration the spectator must necessarily endure. Once the murder is complete, the camera also calls attention to temporality by lingering on the deceased man's caved-in skull: as Stephen Hunter points out, "the camera doesn't look away from the act as it plays out without offering any form of support for Alex. In this sense of voyeurism, then, the Rectum sequence shares with the rape sequence an indirect subjectivity that contributes to the film's in-the-body-ness: just as we follow Pierre and Marcus into the depths of a nightclub with equal confidence and confusion—largely elicited through cinematography—we also follow Alex down into the underpass, the medium shot behind her head emphasizing our own identification with her. This shot is reminiscent of Noé's similar work in Enter the Void (2009), which Noé discusses in the context of "his analysis of his own perception ... [in that] he sees himself in silhouetted in his memories and dreams" (B 18). It can similarly be argued, then, that this very subjective notion of the director's perception can be placed within the context of Irreversible, for as we are meant to identify with Oscar (Nathaniel Brown) in the first-person narrative of Void through this angle, we are also drawn to identify with Alex by following her through the underpass. Similar to the fire extinguisher scene, the spectator identifies with the victim not through mere representation, but direct affect.2

A further instance of this relation between the body (for both characters and spectators) and temporality is the central event that catalyzes the aforementioned attack in the Rectum nightclub: Alex's rape by Le Tenia. It lasts a total of nine minutes, and takes the camera of the rape to an even further level in that the camera simply lies on the ground of an underpass, framing Le Tenia and Alex in a medium-long shot, and remains completely motionless for the duration of the vicious rape. In the relationship between spectator and screen there lies a voyeuristic gaze, the normally private element of sex now dismantled through the spectator's own act of intrusion; this is emphasized when we catch a glimpse of a passerby wandering into the tunnel from the opposite end, only to stop short upon the viewing of the act, and back out without offering any form of support for Alex. In this sense of voyeurism, the rape sequence shares with the Rectum sequence the quality of "his analysis of his own perception ... [in that] he sees himself in silhouetted in his memories and dreams" (B 18). It can similarly be argued, then, that this very subjective notion of the director's perception can be placed within the context of Irreversible, for as we are meant to identify with Oscar (Nathaniel Brown) in the first-person narrative of Void through this angle, we are also drawn to identify with Alex by following her through the underpass. Similar to the fire extinguisher scene, the spectator identifies with the victim not through mere representation, but direct affect.2

In the results of a research project conducted on audience responses to watching sexual violence onscreen, Martin Barker lists a number of aspects that he believes constitute the dangers of filmic rape, one of which would appear to support this notion: "There is a belief that to show, for instance, a rape on screen is ... almost to enact the rape for real. The line between the represented and the real is seen to be particularly fragile in this case" (107). Such an erasure of the boundary between reality and representation occurs in a number of ways: just as Alex is trapped on the ground, so are we; just as she is trapped within the confines of a small tunnel, so too do we feel the claustrophobic confines; and most importantly, just as Alex must endure the violence for nine unbroken minutes, the spectator must also withstand the event for its entire duration.

Describing the camerawork in this sequence as "crucially static" and committing to an "excrucciating ... single-shot," Palmer emphasizes the "punishing "nature that temporality enacts (77). Other critics have noted the anti-pathetic nature elicited from the unbroken gaze: the audience must "sit in anguish through a solitary shot," one describes (Sells n. pag., emphasis added); another argues that it's "difficult to know what to do during those nine minutes in which Bellucci lies prone, moaning and weeping. . . . . You can leave—although Noé would probably consider that a victory" (Edelstein n. pag.); the duration of the shot is brought to the fore in another critic's description of the "10-minute-long take" wherein Alex "endures a vicious anal rape" (Baumgarten n. pag., emphasis added); and finally, J. Hoherman notes that the "nastiness lasts eight minutes but feels far longer. Having found its meat at last, Noé's camera stops turning carwhelw and settle down to masticate upon the unsavoury spectacle" (n. pag., emphasis added).

There are yet many more reviews and articles referring to the rape sequence in such a manner. Often, descriptors are employed to point to the inescapability of the sequence (relating Alex's rape to that of the spectator, both helpless), and in so doing, inherently discuss the duration not with the victim but with the killer" (n. pag.). While this possibility should certainly be recognized with regard to Irreversible, such a position does not seem to reflect the experience of most commentators.

2. One might raise the question of identification lying with the attacker rather than the victim, a position that is not my current focus, but that warrants further reseach. In his review of Irreversible, David Edelstein contends that the camera "leers" at Bellucci, with Noé "on the verge of implying that such queering visipens can't be left unmolested in a world like this, that by natural law it ought to be defiled" (n. pag.). Roger Ebert suggests that, upon the release of I Spit on Your Grave (Meat Zuchti 1980), "the new horror films encouraged audience identification with the man, who is preparing to sodomize a semi-conscious initial with Marcus having his arm snapped by the man sequence's most graphic burst of violence occurs, beginning never slowing down. This is the case, at least, until the se inability to cease movement: it twists, turns, and lurches, temps détruit tout," also seen on a title card at the film's murs, in the opening shot, that time destroys all things ("Le
... the Rectum sequence shares with the rape sequence an indirect subjectivity that contributes to the film’s in-the-body-ness...

long take “[triggered] ontological awareness” (Siméy 352). The essence of the long take, however, finds its theoretical underpinnings in the early writings of André Bazin, formulating (and subsequently favouring) realist film theory: Bazin called for the depiction of objective reality through film, citing documentaries and the films of the Italian neo-realist as examples, and argued that techniques such as the long take were preferable to this end over montage editing. Noé exemplifies real filmmaking through his treatment of the two sequences contemplated herein that focus on the human body and, through indirect subjectivity, are transposed into the shoes of each victim. The indirect subjectivity dissipates representation and symbolism for pure voyeuristic nature may instinctively cause discomfort within the spectator; while this uneasiness is due to the nature of the discourse rather than the content of the image, the subway sequence shares with the previous examples the long take’s property of forcing the viewer to endure the action within the frame. So it is, then, that the (static) long take, in establishing for the spectator a direct connection between the temporal properties of the image and those experienced in reality, acts as a central factor in constructing the film’s in-the-body-ness. We are forced to witness two separate attacks on the human body and, through indirect subjectivity, are transposed into the shoes of each victim. The indirect subjectivity dissipates representation and symbolism for pure physiological and psychological response, achieved through the manipulation of cinematography: the dizzying camerawork mimics the confusion and anxiety that Pierre and Marcus experience in unfamiliar territory, while the static long takes force us to become one with Pierre’s victim and Alex, the stasis and unbroken duration eliciting within the viewer a state of ontological contemplation. Noé constructs the image in the face of reality, and in turn pushes ideas of the haptic to the fore: we no longer witness bodily pain, but now experience it for ourselves.

Works Cited


Infecting Images
The Aesthetics of Movement in Rammbock

Zombie cinema is known not for its intricate character development, but for its visceral affect on the spectator, achieved largely through images of abjection such as rotting corpses feeding upon the living. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, Europe breathed new life into the slow-moving, brain-hungry monsters made popular by George A. Romero back in 1968. Employing high-definition technology, lightning-fast jump-cuts, and hyperrealistic depictions of blood and gore, European zombie films such as 28 Days Later (Danny Boyle 2002) and [Rec] (Jaume Balaguéro and Paco Plaza 2007) exaggerated the rules that had been faithfully followed by their American ancestors. Zombies came from Great Britain, Spain, and France. The epidemic lacked a German specimen until Marvin Kren’s one-hour film, Rammbock, hit German television in winter 2010. Rammbock is not (that) bloody, not (that) gory, and prima vista represents the contrary to the aforementioned European zombie films. While it could be argued that Rammbock’s lack of extreme gore is due to budgetary constraints or censorship, this essay regards it as an artistic decision that shifts the perspective from the eviscerated body to the eviscerated image; such a shift in perspective strips the zombie narrative to the bone, exposing the cinematic ontology of the zombie as being less about extreme gore than it is about the extreme interaction between the photographic image and the gesturing human form.

Rammbock’s plot follows the classics: Berlin is in a state of chaos when a viral outbreak transforms humans into raging zombies. We enter the chaos along with Michael (Michael Fuith), who has just arrived in Berlin with the hope of winning back his ex-girlfriend, Gabi (Anna Graczyk). Within minutes of his arrival, Michael is attacked by an infected handyman and winds up trapped inside Gabi’s abandoned apartment with Harper (Theo Trebo), the handyman’s apprentice. A television newscast reveals that the virus spreads through blood and saliva, and that while there is no known cure, ingesting sedatives and/or avoiding strong emotions can inhibit the virus. The hallways and courtyard teem with zombies, and as Michael and Harper grow hungry, they realize their dire situation. When a neighbouring tenant promises them food in exchange for sedatives, the two decide that the elderly woman next door is their best bet and, chased by the infected, they break into her suite. Their mission leads to two revelations: Michael finds Gabi hiding in the attic with her new lover, and, more importantly, Harper discovers that the flash on his camera is a useful weapon against the infected. With Harper in the lead, the survivors “shoot” their way through the building. As the others—consisting of Harper and a young woman—escape to a small boat, Michael, who has been bitten, stands in the courtyard and lets the infection take over as Gabi, who is also infected, runs angrily into his arms.

Though it features a classic zombie narrative, Rammbock lacks the action and gore common to the genre, placing focus instead on character development and emotional conflict. This switch in emphasis underscores the eviscerated image over the eviscerated body, drawing attention to the ways in which the human form and the photographic lens interact to shape the appearance of movement in cinema. In order to trigger the switch, Rammbock introduces a peculiar new detail into the zombie narrative: one can keep the infection at bay by taking sedative drugs. According to French philosopher Jacques Derrida, such drugs function as pharmakón, as medication and poison at the same time (“The Rhetoric of Drugs” n. pag.). This idea lies at the heart of a notable parallelism that Rammbock creates in which the pharmacological figuration of sedatives is transposed to the photographic dispositive that the film visualizes. By paralleling sedatives with photography, the film performs a gestural process in which cinematic movement
Rammbock transposes the visceral extremism common to European horror cinema from the corporeal to the pictorial level.

and photographic standstill, acceleration and deceleration, continuously interrupt one another. Rammbock’s infected embody this process, their design creating an aporetic tension between the unmoving photographic image and the moving cinematic one. The infected cannot be captured in the regimes of movement or standstill; instead, they perpetually interrupt one another. Through these cinematic devices Rammbock’s infected leap from one still image to another in fragmented images—a body part, a face, a voice. In this way the camera not only devours movement, but also penetrates its object like a surgeon, leaving it dismembered, or splattered.1

Zombie films expose the bodies bursting into dysfunction, either visualized via depictions of gore, or transposed to the formal structure of film by employing montage to anticipate the splattered body. Rammbock employs fragmented images to metaphorically anticipate the splattered body by exposing a gestural crisis, an abject movement.2 The zombie, a living corpse that threatens the structural boundaries of the subject-object relation, is abject in the most radical sense; it is the materialization of a crisis of movement, a visible transgression of what Deleuze calls the sensory-motor link between stimulus and response (Deleuze 311). The series of images depicting the infected ceases to simulate cinematic motion as well as the human form: a cut interrupts a movement, jumps to an image portraying a single body part, and then jumps again to a blurred action accompanied by a strange scream. Through these cinematic devices Rammbock’s infected rupture movement and hasten action. The speed produced by the jump-cuts and high-speed montage that—similar to the way in which Derrida’s 

maman — fragment masculin simultaneously hurts and heals—concurrently interrupts the cinematic action and return it to the realm of photographic images: the faster they move, the closer they resemble a series of disconnected photographs. In this way the infected represent a breakdown of the aforementioned sensory-motor link between stimulus and response (Deleuze 311). The series of images depicting the infected ceases to represent teleological action, exposing instead a process that destabilizes the very structure of human movement. Rammbock screens the breakdown of the sensory-motor link by substituting it with a multitude of disconnected snapshots, but that breakdown is never completed. At no time does Rammbock burst entirely into photographs: it is still a film, but it is infected with photographic images that threaten its mediality. The zombies thus mark a metanarrative in which both media—photography and film—coincide, transforming the coincidence of photographic standstill and cinematic action into movement, a gestural state in which the two simultaneously occur.

Agamben Infected

The idea of movement is similar, though not identical, to Giorgio Agamben’s concept of gesture as described in “Notes on Gesture” (58-60). In the essay, Agamben refers to Marcus Tertentius Varro’s De lingua latina [On the Latin Language] in order to differentiate the gesture from two other forms of “doing,” which Varro refers to as agere and facere. Facere means to produce something, like a piece of art. A playwright produces a play, but he does not perform it. Agere means to accomplish the performance of something—for example, the play is performed (agitur) by

The gesture is the exposition of pure mediality, a sustained hesitation separating the body from agere and facere.

1 See Benjamin, Walter.
2 See Kratzer, Julia.
tors. Both modes of doing are essentially teleological, for they aim to accomplish something (i.e. writing the play or performing it). A third mode of doing is the gesture, which involves neither producing nor performing something, but carrying and sustaining it instead. With reference to Aristotle, Agamben concludes that *facere* is a means to an end, whereas *agere* is a pure purpose without means. Contrary to *agere* and *facere*, the gesture neither answers a purpose, nor is it a purpose in itself: it is a means without a purpose. The gesture is the exposition of pure mediality, a sustained hesitation separating the body from *agere* and *facere*. Agamben claims that every image, whether it be cinematic or photographic, is essentially gestural, because every image is caught in a double bind, concurrently mortified and dynamic. On the one hand, images expose the erasure of the (conventional concept of) gesture, that is to say, the mortification of the object. On the other hand, they keep up the idea of movement, the desire to be liberated from being frozen in time. Within this very tension, the gesture sustains the impossible sphere between movement (dynamis) and standstill (mortification). It is a mode of doing without transcendence, which exposes mediality as such. With this idea of gesture in mind, one can argue that photography longs for cinema, just as cinema longs for photography. If *Rammbock* depicts the continuous breakdown of the sensory-motor link but never completes it, photography can be regarded as the sustained exposition and repetition of that breakdown: neither moving nor standing still; not entirely mortified photograph nor completely mobile film; neither producing nor performing something, but carrying and sustaining its aporta. The infected, caught between cinematic and photographic image, are carriers of the virus of movement.

Because the corridors and courtyard are unsafe, *Rammbock*’s survivors are confined to their apartments. The film’s narrative is seemingly constructed with the aim of overcoming the gestural existence—to slow down the infected and to accelerate the survivors; however, this attempted recovery is nothing but a variation of *agere*. The process of recovery begins with Michael and Harper breaking into the elderly woman’s apartment with a battering ram. Wallis signify isolation, not only the urban social phenomenon, but also the situation of being safe but stuck and separated from each other. With its isolated units, the film’s apartment complex signifies both security and confinement. With regard to the latter, the act of breaking through the building’s walls might initially seem to represent movement and freedom; however, the attempted action is far from being *agere*. Michael and Harper create the battering ram (*facere*) and break through the wall (*agere*) only to find themselves surrounded by zombies and forced into a deeper state of captivity, their failure to fully realise their goals negating their attempts at doing. The survivors do not actually break out of the building; instead, they encourage their interrupted migration through it, accompanied by a horde of infected. In this example, *agere* and *facere* achieve nothing but *movere*. Like a drug, the battering ram works only for a moment, and is soon replaced by other objects that stimulate the action and sedate the infected, and vice versa.

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**Shooting**

*Rammbock*’s opening credits reveal photographs of Michael and Gabi happy together; later, in Gabi’s apartment, Michael melancholically contemplates these photos on his digital camera. Still further along in the film, Harper photographs Michael as he poses next to their homemade battering ram. In this way photography is introduced as a culturally significant medium of anamnesis as well as a surrogate to fill the void created by severe loss. Loss materializes in Michael’s broken relationship with Gabi. The happy couple depicted in the photos on his digital camera no longer exists outside of the virtual, pictorial realm; thus it is fitting that Michael and Gabi are only truly reunited when they are both infected and thereby transposed back into the gestural realm. The scene of their reunion, presented through a sequence of reduced cuts, is peculiar: Michael embraces Gabi; she epileptically moves her arms and punches against his back; Michael’s slow movements and Gabi’s fast ones collide as they push against one another, replacing their broken relationship with *movere*. Their embrace emblematically exposes the gap between action and purpose, frozen into an undead sculpture: it doesn’t reunite the living couple, but doubles the gesture of photography as a sustained and exposed attempt to rebuild a relationship. In paralleling the images of Michael and Gabi in a happy relationship with their final, undead reunion, *Rammbock* has the couple perform the paradox of being frozen and accelerated at the same time. By the film’s end, Michael and Gabi at last become *the movere* series of photographs in which they were introduced during the opening credits.

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**The Photo Camera as Downer**

Healing the wound of loss is not the only application of photography. In order to continue the process of endless recovery, the sequences following the battering ram scene reintroduce the photographic dispositive. The logic of the infection contains the possibility to prevent the virus from breaking out by ingesting sedatives. In an interesting parallel to the medical sedatives, the digital photo camera is applied to achieve similar effects. Let us return to the scene in the elderly woman’s apartment, in which Harper discovers that the infected are hurt by the flash of his digital camera (later we learn that the infected’s retinas are highly sensitive and easy to injure). A flash released from the camera forces the zombified woman to momentarily back away and mute her epileptic motions. Followed by the other survivors, Harper uses his camera to shoot his way through the raging mob and “flash” the building’s infected inhabitants out into the courtyard, closing the door behind them. Thus the survivors regain the possibility to move, albeit only for a brief moment, as the courtyard is full of zombies just waiting for another opportunity to attack.

In contrast with the rest of the film, which is relatively well lit, *Rammbock*’s final showdown occurs in the black of night. Infected but doing his best to suppress it with sedatives, Michael sets up the other two survivors—Harper and a young woman—with a bicycle and trailer covered in a professional photographer’s flash light devices. As the courtyard door opens, the flashlights go off, cutting through the darkness in blinding blasts like a stroboscope. There is no lighting in this scene other than the ephemeral flashes emanating from the rigged bicycle as Harper and the young woman shoot their way through the infected mob. Successful ‘shots’ are immediately followed by other attacks. The aesthetics of the sequence shows a coincidence of what *Rammbock* had in stores throughout: the possibility to transform into *movere*. What was previously suggested in the flickering cuts of the zombie attacks is now forcefully expressed through the flash-cut darkness. The sequence clearly depicts the infected as a series of disconnected photo
Breaking the frame in Rammbock means to spill photographic images like blood; trying to heal the damaged body of the film with sedating photography only makes it worse.

Throughout the film, the use of the photographic camera produces a cycle of relief and severe withdrawal that creates in its user the urge to permanently recharge his medical—or medial, as the case may be—pharmacy. To battle Rammbock's infected with photography is to fight gesture with rupture, and rupture with rupture. On the one hand, photographic images hasten and disrupt the cinematicphi effect (as a stimulant), while on the other hand, paralleled with sedative medication, they are required to cure the exacerbated excess of images. Rammbock's survivors attempt to calm the film's formal structure by injecting photography into its already photographically ruptured aesthetics. One witnesses the results in the finale, as Harper and the young woman race through the darkness on the rigged bicycle, their many flashlights simultaneously interrupting the attacks of the infected as well as the continuous motion of the film itself. The sequence instructs us that breaking a frame and trying to repair it only produces a multitude of other frames, a visible series of photographs. These static images splatter the moving, cinematic image and cause movement, exposing the uneasy state in which film and photography coexist.

Rammbock confronts us with the terror of this state while simultaneously exploring its liberating effects. Liberation, as Nietzsche describes it, is only framable through terriﬁable pain. It is through this understanding of liberation that movement emerges as a political concept, the painful exposure of the aporetic space—the simultaneously therapeutic and toxic space of the pharmakon—in which one is faced with the impossible decision of which regime will succeed. While the survivors ﬁght against movement, inevitably approaching what they aim to keep away, the bodies of the infected, trapped in movement, concentrate the survivors’ struggle and cause it to continue indeﬁnitely. The bodies of the infected represent movement as a perpetual struggle against the metaphysics of clear oppositions such as action and inaction, stimulation and sedation, and cinema and photography. Torn between these oppositions, their bodies outline the politics of the subject as essentially alethiologi cal. These bodies that are in movement against themselves present an interesting political philosophy. The metaphysics of the opposition of photography and film that becomes associated with the opposition of the infected and the survivor is continuously undermined throughout the film by the pharmacological technique of photography. This disrupted metaphysics establishes a continuous liberation of the body from its either dead (photographic) or living (ﬁlmic) ﬁguration into undead movement, not entirely destroying the opposition but infecting each pole of it with its opposite. It prevents each of them from becoming hegemonic and installs movement as the aporetic simultaneity of identity and difference. Movement—the visible aspect of the infection—is stronger than order, not to be captured and only to be indeﬁnitely performed. Although Rammbock looks like a ﬁnalized narrative, and although Harper and the young woman escape in a boat at the end, the history of zombie ﬁlms assures us that there is always a sequel, and thus the cycle continues.
The Quiet Revulsion
Québécois New Extremism in 7 Days

There was no bigger sea change in Quebec culture than The Quiet Revolution of the 1960s, and it is here we find the roots of a particularly French-Canadian brand of cinematic new extremism, as embodied by the 2010 film *Les 7 jours du talion,* or *7 Days.* Adapted into a screenplay by Patrick Senécal from his own novel (also titled *Les 7 jours du talion,* 2002) and directed by Québécois filmmaker Daniel Grou (who also goes by the name “Podz”), it is one of the few Canadian films comparable to the European new extremist cinema described by Tanya Horeck and Tina Kendall in their introduction to *The New Extremism in Cinema: From France to Europe.* *7 Days* shares with its European cousins a sense of “determined transgression” (Horeck and Kendall 2), specifically via its use of shocking imagery and depictions of brutality characteristic of horror cinema (or its torture porn subgenre), with narrative and directorial techniques most often associated with art house cinema. Furthermore, although Québecois cinema is considered to have more in common with that of France than that of English Canada, *7 Days* represents a culmination of anxieties that are specific to the social, cultural, and political history of the Québécois, particularly their relationship to the Roman Catholic Church, which exercised a powerful hegemony over the people of the province.

An examination of the forces shaping the film reveals that it looks inward—speaking to its own people, perhaps in the tradition of Quebec’s direct cinema—rather than “fitting with the rising global tide of sex and violence and appealing to younger audiences” (Vincendeau 205). For example, as of November 25, 2012, retail site Amazon.ca ranked sales of the *7 Days* DVD at 24,338, compared to France-made new extremist film *Martyrs* (Pascal Laugier 2008), which was ranked in the same category at 4,196. Similarly, *7 Days* has a mere twelve reviews on popular review aggregator site RottenTomatoes.com, compared to 83 for *Enter the Void* (Gaspar Noé 2009) and 154 for *Antichrist* (Lars von Trier 2009)—new extremist films with a considerably more robust worldwide presence in terms of film festival entries, media coverage, and distribution. It can therefore be argued that *7 Days* represents a uniquely Québécois brand of cinematic new extremism, one that speaks to its own particular cultural history and anxieties.

To begin to understand *7 Days,* a look at the history of Quebec is essential. In 1534, explorer Jacques Cartier erected a cross in the Gaspé Peninsula and created the first province of New France. In 1627, King Louis XIII of France declared that only Roman Catholics could settle in the territory. In 1759, the British took control of the city after the Battle of the Plains of Abraham, and in 1763 the Treaty of Paris forced France to give up its North American claims to Great Britain. That year, New France became the Province of Quebec. Due to growing unrest between the French and the English, the Quebec Act of 1774 officially recognized French language and culture, and preserved the Roman Catholic Church via provisions that officially granted freedom of religion. As Michel Houle points out, the Church was the most powerful entity in Quebec for most of the province’s existence, and this has been reflected in Québécois cinema:

> “[t]he most obvious and consistent theme of the first period [of Quebec cinema] is unquestionably the omnipresence and the near omniscience of the clergy… . It is easy to explain why this theme was so powerful and permanent in the forties and fifties. It ‘reflects’ the real influence of the Church in the social and cultural life of the Quebec people… . [The Church] had almost complete and exclusive jurisdiction in the fields of social affairs and health (hospitals, orphanages, convalescent homes, charitable institutions, reform schools, etc.). (n. pag.)”
7 Days represents a culmination of anxieties that are specific to the social, cultural, and political history of the Québécois ...
High-profile Quebec actor Claude Legault stars in 7 Days as Bruno Hamel, a surgeon living in the suburbs with his wife Sylvie (Fanny Mallette) and their only child, Jasmin (Rose-Marie Coallier). The couple allows the young girl to walk the few blocks to school one morning while they have a romp, only to discover that evening that she was abducted, raped, and murdered. A labourer named Anthony Lemaire (Martin Dubreuil) is arrested for the crime; however, Hamel is dissatisfied with the machinations of the justice system and concocts a plan to kidnap him. While the prisoner is being transported, Hamel steals the van and brings Lemaire to a lakeside cabin, confining him to a makeshift surgery room/torture chamber. The doctor informs both his wife and the police—a phone call rerouted through a remote laptop—that he intends to torture and kill Lemaire in the seven days leading up to Jasmin’s birthday, and then himself in. As Detective Mercure (Rémy Girard) and his officers hunt for Hamel, the doctor brutalizes his captive. The torture becomes increasingly gruesome, yet Hamel is unable to find any satisfaction or relief in his actions, only to discover that Hamel has relocated his anus to the Seven Days of Creation. As such, seven is recognized in the Bible, the Seven Virtues, the Seven Sacraments, and, most often, the Seven Spiritual Acts of Mercy, the Seven Deadly Sins, and Seven Sinful Acts of Charity. Despite its affinities with Catholic imagery, these images are symbolically charged, and Hamel’s refusal to provide closure or narrative redemption in the end reinforces the critique of Catholicism apparent in the film’s symbolism.

The perversion of Catholic imagery has been a centre-piece in previous (France) French films in the new extremism canon, as illustrated by Pascal Laugier’s Martyrs, which was partially shot in Quebec. Despite its affinities with French new extremist cinema, 7 Days lays out its critique of Catholicism within the particular framework of Quebec’s cinematic heritage and exhibits some of the central conventions of that tradition, for example, in the portrayal of Hamel. In his aforementioned article, Houle identifies a hero trope from the early days of Quebec cinema, which he describes as the humiliated hero, beaten but morally righteous. By sacrificing their lives or their happiness, rather than failing in their duties (duties that are imposed on them, voluntarily or not), these characters are forces that linger in Québécois culture, simmering until boiling over in 7 Days. Like the films of European new extremism, 7 Days makes a visceral appeal to the spectator through its combination of art house aesthetics and brutal content; however, it does so in a way that is uniquely Québécois. This work of new extremism is grounded in Québécois culture through its transgressive content, and can be understood as the eruption of the internal cultural forces described herein. The result is a caustic cinematic experience that speaks volumes about its place, people, and history. By generating its critique of Quebec’s traumatic past through regional film conventions, graphic content, and perversions of Catholic imagery, 7 Days asserts itself as a loud aftershock of Quebec’s Quiet Revolution.

The procedure is shown via graphic close-ups, as Hamel cuts open Lemaire, who is incapacitated by curare but still able to feel the surgery, and digs around inside of him. Le maire passes out after the procedure, regaining consciousness only to discover that Hamel has relocated his anus to the side of his torso. He lies chained to the floor as fecal matter gurgles out of his side, and Hamel feeds him and cares for his wounds enough to keep him alive and suffering for the duration of the week. The uncompromising brutality of these scenes constitutes an assault on the spectator that is reminiscent of the disturbing, anti-voyeuristic effects of European new extremist and Grou present a post-Québécois, post-Quiet Revolution. Quebec hero who is self-determined and refuses to rely on the institutions that have proven to be either ineffectual or downright monstrous. Detective Mercure, by contrast, is presented as the foil to Hamel and embodies an old Québécois way of thinking, in which the individual allows himself to be at the mercy of the official institutions. Whereas Hamel is handsome and physically fit, Mercure is flabby and unattractive. Both of them have lost loved ones to violence, but while Hamel is proactive in shaping the outcome of his situation, Mercure continues to live in the house that be shared with his wife: he sleeps on the couch because he boarded up their bedroom, and repeatedly views security camera footage of her death. He is only able to track down Hamel on the seventh day, after being outwitted on several occasions, and laments not finding him sooner. Mercure is a broken-down, ineffectual hero, who exists within the system and pleads with Hamel to do the same. By contrast, Hamel represents an independent viewpoint that falls in line with a Quebec nationalist way of thinking; if the Church has a broken moral compass, the police allow citizens of the province to be victimized, and the courts do not sufficiently deter criminals, then the individual must act independently. Secular self-sufficiency is heroic in a post-Québécois culture that continues to be haunted by its past, although the efficacy of such a position is called into question by the lack of resolution at the end of the film. Abused and murdered children, medical experimentation, a failed justice system, and Roman Catholic guilt are forces that linger in Québécois culture, simmering until boiling over in 7 Days. Like the films of European new extremism, 7 Days makes a visceral appeal to the spectator through its combination of art house aesthetics and brutal content; however, it does so in a way that is uniquely Québécois. This work of new extremism is grounded in Québécois culture through its transgressive content, and can be understood as the eruption of the internal cultural forces described herein. The result is a caustic cinematic experience that speaks volumes about its place, people, and history. By generating its critique of Quebec’s traumatic past through regional film conventions, graphic content, and perversions of Catholic imagery, 7 Days asserts itself as a loud aftershock of Quebec’s Quiet Revolution.

Works Cited


52 CINEMEPHILE / Vol. 8, No. 2 / Fall 2012

Contemporary Extremism / Articles

53
Extreme Vancouver

In the preface to this issue of Cinephile, Tanya Hoiteck and Tina Kendall note the importance of approaching extreme cinema in a way that recognizes aesthetic, cultural, and historical differences. This approach need not eliminate the possibility for a comparative approach to extreme cinema, however, as making links between films across cultures and periods can help to illuminate the particular ways that each film addresses the spectator through a distinctive treatment of challenging subject matter. With this comparative approach in mind, we sought to gauge the situation of extreme cinema within the particular context of Vancouver's cinema culture by attending the Vancouver International Film Festival.

The Vancouver International Film Festival (VIFF) takes place in late September and early October every year, and prides itself on being one of the five largest film festivals in the world. VIFF offers a fantastic variety of films, its selection of horror and extremist cinema leaves something to be desired. In comparison to other film festivals, there are not a lot of horror or extremist films. With this comparative approach in mind, we sought to gauge the situation of extreme cinema within the particular context of Vancouver's cinema culture through attending the Vancouver International Film Festival.

At VIFF, we interviewed Curtis Woloschuk, VIFF program assistant, to inquire about the lack of programming featuring horror and other film genres that commonly overlap with extremity cinema. His responses suggest four key reasons: budget, submission quality, programmer tastes, and audience interest. Much-anticipated horror films such as V/H/S (Matt Bettinelli-Olpin et al.) and The Lords of Sa-lern (Rob Zombie), for instance, have distributors attached, and this can sometimes include prohibitively high screening fees. As VIFF is a not-for-profit organization, it has a limited budget and must be careful about its expenditures. Regarding quality, Woloschuk explained that due to the lack of genre programming at VIFF, many films that might be considered extremist end up being submitted, by filmmakers informed of VIFF’s tastes, to festivals that are more likely to accept them. As for the the films that do make it to VIFF’s programming panel, according to Woloschuk, few of them are innovative or boundary-pushing enough to be considered. The festival’s reputation plays a part in the submissions it receives, but the programmers also factor into the equation: “There really isn’t much appetite—or personal interest—amongst most of the veteran programmers at the festival for horror (and other genre) films.” Because they often avoid genre films while scouting at other festivals, programmers risk overlooking new extremist cinema as well. Regarding audience interest, Woloschuk explains, “from what I am told by more experienced parties, horror films have tended not to draw well at the VIFF.” He did note that items such as Let the Right One In, which “reside between the arthouse and grindhouse territory by infusing the documentary mode with confrontational aesthetics and affect,” and The Lords of Salern, which “reside from the Sensory Ethnography Lab at Harvard, and explores extremity to new ontological territory by infusing the documentary mode with confrontational aesthetics and affect.”

Arguably, the most viscerally affective film at VIFF this year was a nature documentary. VIFF has a reputation for its ecologically focused documentaries, but Leviathan is more like a horror film than a BBC nature special. Filmmakers Véréna Paravel and Lucien Castaing-Taylor operate from the Sensory Ethnography Lab at Harvard, and their work is a combination of anthropology, documentary, and visual art; their latest film is a nightmarish exposition of life on a fishing trawler off the Massachusetts coast that takes the “sensory” part of the lab’s moniker seriously. The dizzying effect of cameras being attached the sides of the ship’s hull, the helmets of the fishermen, in amongst the dead and dying catch, and on poles thrust high up in the air is emphasized by the film’s hellish soundscape: rushing, crackling water, slippery sounds of fish sliding in their own gore past the camera, thunderous wind, and crashing waves have a gut-churning impact on the spectator. The resulting experience is nauseating and exhilarating, contemplative and contemptible, contradictions that evoke comparisons with the art house/grindhouse aesthetic of new extremist cinema (the nod to Claire Denis in the credits gives further credence to this comparison).

The experience of Leviathan was polarizing; while some spectators we spoke to claimed it was one of the more daring and original films they had seen, it was also the most walk-out-of-film we saw at the festival—indeed, one of us could not even make it through the first hour for fear of vomiting. Controversy is a hallmark of extreme cinema, a result of its often-ambiguous position between conventions, taste regimes, and social norms; Leviathan positions itself between horror film and nature film, heavy metal and high art, and transports extremity to new ontological territory by infusing the documentary mode with confrontational aesthetics and affect.
At first glance Marina (Olya Dykhovschyna) seems to have it all: a loving husband, a fulfilling job, and the respect of her friends. After being viciously raped by three police officers, Marina realizes that she has none of the aforementioned things: her husband is unfaithful, her job is meaningless, and her friends are parasitic and selfish. Angelina Nikanova’s debut feature film is a bleak and impassive look at life in modern Moscow, and it has incited controversy among festival audiences due to its challenging subject matter and inscrutable protagonist. According to the VIFF program, the assault transforms Marina into “a nocturnal creature drawn to depravity”: she engages in a perverse and perplexing sexual relationship with one of her abusers, who responds to her professions of love with aversion and violence. Marina might be a martyr or a masochist, depending on how you interpret her actions.

Labelled as “shocking” and “uncompromising,” *Twilight Portrait* is one of few films in the VIFF program described in a way that suggests extreme content, ostensibly advertising to audiences that appreciate challenging art. Labelled as “shocking” and “uncompromising,” *Twilight Portrait* is one of few films in the VIFF program described in a way that suggests extreme content, ostensibly advertising to audiences that appreciate challenging art. Labelled as “shocking” and “uncompromising,” *Twilight Portrait* is one of few films in the VIFF program described in a way that suggests extreme content, ostensibly advertising to audiences that appreciate challenging art. Labelled as “shocking” and “uncompromising,” *Twilight Portrait* is one of few films in the VIFF program described in a way that suggests extreme content, ostensibly advertising to audiences that appreciate challenging art. Labelled as “shocking” and “uncompromising,” *Twilight Portrait* is one of few films in the VIFF program described in a way that suggests extreme content, ostensibly advertising to audiences that appreciate challenging art.

Berberian Sound Studio

Berberian Sound Studio (Peter Strickland) introduces us to Gilderoy (Toby Jones), who departs from his job as a sound designer at a British children’s show to work on an Italian horror film. As his work progresses, Gilderoy realizes that he’s not cut out for horror. His attempts to quit fail, and the job begins to drive him mad. The critical reception of *Berberian* has been divided: some love its homage to Italian giallo films and sound design; others regard it as pretentious, dull, and purposely abstruse. Most agree that it caters to a highbrow, art house audience that excludes the common horror fan.

In new extremist films, the human body serves as a canvas upon which great violence is exacted: in *Dans ma peau*, a woman takes cutting to a new level; in *Trouble Every Day*, a man’s sexuality is inextricable from his primal urge to tear people apart; in *Antichrist*, a woman pummels her husband’s penis before bringing him to a bloody orgasm, and then removes her own clitoris with a pair of shears. In many of the films discussed in our issue, including *Irreversible*, *Ravennbeck*, and *Young Girl in Black*, the extremist content is present in the narrative as well as in the visual style of the films themselves. *Berberian*’s extreme content is present in both of these things, but it is most notable in the film’s transference of violence from the human form to the food that sustains it: Gilderoy transforms hot grease on a pan into a hot poker entering a woman’s vagina; cabbages and melons become similarly mistreated body parts. The simultaneous contempt and coveting of celebrities in contemporary society forms the basis for Anton Cronenberg’s *Antiviral*, which is set in a world in which celebrity flaws—namely, their viruses—are sold to anyone willing and able to pay the price. Our hero, Syd (Caleb Landry Jones), sells celebrity viruses to customers of the Lucas Clinic by day and moonlights as a bootlegger of those same viruses, which he brings home by injecting himself with them at work. The clinic is not the only organization profiting from celebrity skin: butcher shops sell meat made from celebrity cells—meat that people eagerly consume.

Despite the sterile white sets in which the events of *Antiviral* unfold, the film effectively communicates a sense of infection; in fact, one might even argue that these enhance the horror rather than diminishing it. To paraphrase Cronenberg (Jr.), who spoke after the screening on September 29, 2012, the crisp, clean whiteness of nearly every location in *Antiviral* contrasts sharply with the “meanly-new” of the people depicted in the film. In one scene, for example, globs of gooey blood explode from Syd’s cracked lips onto a bleach-white floor. The contrast between the gore and the simple, clean set is meant to enhance the display’s visceral appeal. The director’s affective aims extended to *Antiviral’s* soundscape, which was designed to infuse the film with a “bodily quality.” The combination of the clinical mise en scène and the pulsating sound design creates a sickening skin around *Antiviral* that threatens to envelope anyone who views it. Indeed, our informal verbal survey of audience responses to the film, as well as critical reviews, suggest that we aren’t the only ones who left the theatre feeling squeamish.

Conclusion

The films discussed herein hail from a variety of cultural contexts and exhibit a number of approaches and techniques, but their shared focus on provocation and affect attests to the heterogeneous nature of contemporary extremist cinema across the globe. Whether through form, content, or a combination of the two, each of these films elicits a response from the spectator that is characterized by a sense of viscerality and transgression. While such extreme films are scarce in VIFF’s programming, their relative success this year suggests that contemporary extreme cinema has a place and a future at the festival. Our hope is that Woloschuk’s prediction comes true, and that the future of VIFF programming will include more challenging, graphic films. From our experiences at VIFF this year, we would argue that Vancouver audiences are more deviant than they appear!

About VIFF: We would like to extend thanks to the people at VIFF for their support, and particularly Curtis Woloschuk for generously giving us an interview. The following information is quoted from VIFF’s website, VIFF.org.

Both in terms of admissions and number of films screened (152,000 and 386 respectively in 2011) VIFF is among the five largest film festivals in North America. We screen films from 80 countries on 10 screens. The international line-up includes the pick of the world’s top film fests and many undiscovered gems. VIFF 2011 included 20 World premieres, 90 International premieres, 49 North American premieres and 40 Canadian premieres. Three main programming platforms make our festival unique: we screen the largest selection of East Asian films outside of that region, we are one of the biggest showcases of Canadian film in the world and we have a large and important nonfiction program.

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