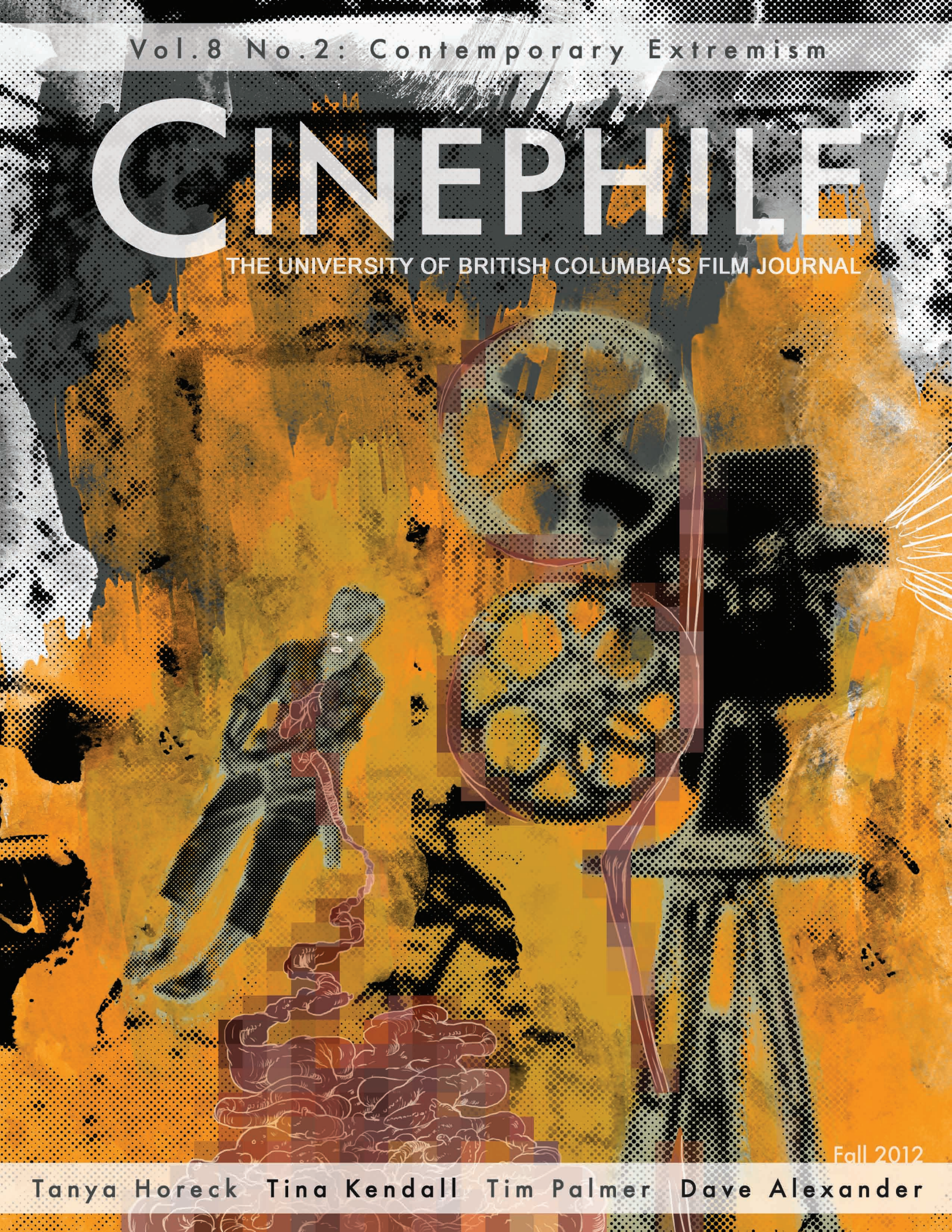


Vol. 8 No. 2: Contemporary Extremism

CINEPHILE

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA'S FILM JOURNAL



Fall 2012

Tanya Horeck Tina Kendall Tim Palmer Dave Alexander

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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 absolue 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 ecstatic 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 absolue 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 Horeck 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's *Dogtooth*, and Claire Denis's *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 correlatives 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. By using the phrase "contemporary extremism" in our title, rather than simply extremism or new extremism, we wish to encourage an approach that acknowledges the potential for extremist cinema beyond a particular time or culture.

Horeck and Kendall's aforementioned preface opens the issue by suggesting the implications of opening the concept of new extremism to include different national contexts, approaches, and styles. Next, Tim Palmer's contribution reconfigures recent discourse about transgressive French cinema, arguing that the extremity in Jean-Paul Civeyrac's *Des filles en noir* resides in its conceptual nihilism rather than in any explicit sex or violence. Kiva Reardon's argument that Alexandre Bustillo and Julien Maury's *À l'intérieur* pushes the limits of the material subject is mirrored in the format of her paper, which is structured to mimic the invaginated

subject that she theorizes. Considering a broader tradition of catharsis and entertainment through violence, Andrea Butler then traces the influence of Grand Guignol Theatre on contemporary extremism. Following that, Timothy Nicodemo takes a haptic approach to cinema, using the example of cinematography in *Irreversible* to argue that aesthetic techniques can be used to affect the spectator on a visceral level. Pointing out the unusual lack of gore in the German zombie film *Rammbock*, Peter Schuck then argues that the film shifts the focus from the extreme gore conventional to the genre towards a kind of extremity in film form. In the piece concluding the articles section of our issue, Dave Alexander encourages a historically sensitive understanding of Québécois extreme cinema, arguing that Daniel Grou's *7 Days* is a visceral response to the horrors of the Quiet Revolution. Finally, the issue concludes with our coverage of extremist cinema at this year's Vancouver International Film Festival.

This issue would not have been possible without the hard work of an amazing group of people. To our editorial board, thank you for your invaluable insights and suggestions. We would also like to express our gratitude to those who submitted articles, as well as to our faculty advisor, Lisa Coulthard, and UBC's Department of Theatre and Film. Special thanks go out to our talented (and very patient) designer, Shaun Inouye, and our incredible artist, Matthew Wise: without them this issue would look as though we threw it together using chainsaws, fingerpaint, and a few awkwardly placed staples.

From the early erotic pictures of the silent era, to the Surrealist movement that emerged in the twenties, to the exploitation and splatter pictures of the seventies and eighties, to the forms of extreme cinema that have emerged globally over the past decade, cinema has always used sex and violence to shock and titillate audiences. Like the film collector feeding his guts into the projector, we are compelled to experience film viscerally; if nothing else, extreme cinema gives us the opportunity to do so. We hope you enjoy our issue, you demented perverts.

- Chelsea Birks & Dana Keller

Contributors

Dave Alexander is the Editor-in-Chief of Toronto-based, horror-themed magazine *Rue Morgue*. He holds a degree in Film and Media Studies from the University of Alberta, is a film programmer, award-winning filmmaker, published fiction writer, and the curator of an art show titled *If They Came From Within: An Alternative History of Canadian Horror*.

Andrea Butler is an MA candidate in Cinema and Media Studies at York University in Toronto. She is currently working on the relationship between horror film posters of the seventies and eighties and the new resurgence of contemporary artists who are reimagining familiar cult classics. Other research interests include the representation of technology in film, theories of spectatorship and affect, documentary aesthetics, and sound in film.

Tanya Horeck 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 Berit Åström and Katarina Gregersdotter) *Rape in Stieg Larsson's Millennium Trilogy and Beyond: Contemporary Scandinavian and Anglophone Crime Fiction* (Palgrave MacMillan 2012).

Tina Kendall is Senior Lecturer in Film Studies at Anglia Ruskin University in Cambridge. She is editor of a special issue of *Film-Philosophy* on disgust (15.2 2011) and co-editor (with Tanya Horeck) of *The New Extremism in Cinema: From France to Europe*. She is currently researching the aesthetics of boredom in contemporary cinema.

Timothy Nicodemo is an MA candidate in Film Studies at Western University. His research interests include: theories of affect, spectatorship, and authorship; film aesthetics; the onscreen representations of violence and sex; transgressive cinema; and contemporary French cinema. The combination of scientific inquiry and film theory is an academic approach he aims to carry out further in future research.

Tim Palmer is the author of *Brutal Intimacy: Analyzing 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.



Tanya Horeck
& Tina Kendall

The New *Extremisms* Rethinking Extreme Cinema

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.¹ 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); Takeshi 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).



were mindful of in our book, noting the need to distinguish between the in-your-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 presses, 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, and evoke different sets of cultural anxieties, pressures, and desires; and finally, how they work through these pressures in often conflicting ways to arrive at different methods of resolving, alleviating, or amplifying them. In short, we need

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 think in detail about the various national and cultural contexts that make extreme cinema relevant, meaningful, and watchable for spectators. From this point of view, what becomes increasingly important to stress is the notion of *extremisms*: different instantiations and mobilizations of the extreme across a range of national perspectives.

Beyond this, it is also important to think about how the rhetoric of extremism has increasingly been taken up within mainstream film contexts. Not only is there a growing “commercial mainstreaming of exploitation and euroshocker titles,” as Hawkins has noted, with bookshops and DVD outlets now making extreme films much more readily available (n. pag.), but the explicit sex and violence of art cinema is being repackaged for mainstream Hollywood audiences through major studio releases. Recently, for example, David Fincher’s Hollywood version of Stieg Larsson’s *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2011) was marketed as a “feel bad film,” explicitly foregrounding the visceral and provocative appeal of extreme, ordeal cinema for a mainstream audience. Another relevant recent example is British director Michael Winterbottom’s Hollywood release *The Killer Inside Me* (2010), which included set-piece scenes of brutality against its A-list female stars, Jessica Alba and Kate Hudson; what was most interesting in the wake of the controversy over the film was how the film’s director and producers justified its extremity through reference to art house traditions, arguing that viewers need to see the worst in order to make violence “real.”

This mainstreaming of graphic sex and violence marks an important point of departure from the paradigm we theorized originally. One of the hallmarks of the new European extremism for us was the specific way that these films imported codes and conventions of exploitation films—including pornography and horror—within the confines of a philosophically inflected art house cinema. The new European extremism’s sensational rise to prominence had to do precisely with the manner in which these films sought to break down the firewalls between pornography, art, exploitation, philosophy, and horror. Conversely, many of the recent variations on extremism in cinema represent

significant departures from, or variations on, these films’ provocative mixing of genre codes. In recent “torture porn”² franchises, or in the new French horror trend,³ for instance, the kind of explicit and confrontational staging of sex and violence that we wrote about initially is arguably repackaged, as Adam Lowenstein notes, “for purposes of audience admiration, provocation, and sensory adventure as much as



shock or terror” (42). Whereas in a film such as *Irreversible*, “graphic violence is designed to assault the target audience’s aesthetic tastes and political belief systems,” in the mode that Lowenstein calls “spectacle horror,” “confrontation or consolidation of audience beliefs through violence . . . is less central than perceptual play” (43). A key task for scholarly work on extreme cinema is to think through fine-grained distinctions between the range of spectatorial dynamics that underpin this shift from art house extremism to multiplex or horror film festival circuit extremisms. While these films might share a desire to push at the boundaries of the watchable, they are addressed to different audience demographics, 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 mettle 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.

2. Coined 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* (Greg McLean 2005), *The Devil’s Rejects* (Rob Zombie 2005), and *A Serbian Film* (Srdjan Spasojević 2010).

3. The new wave of French horror includes films such as *Switchblade Romance* (Alexandre Aja 2003), *Inside* (Alexandre Bustillo and Julien Maury 2007), *Frontier(s)* (Xavier Gens 2007), *The Ordeal* (Fabrice Du Welz 2004), and *Martyrs* (Pascal Laugier 2008).

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, protean 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.

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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*'s extremist reputation comes from its categorical evasiveness, its refusal to shape its textual resources into either coherent socio-political interventions or 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).

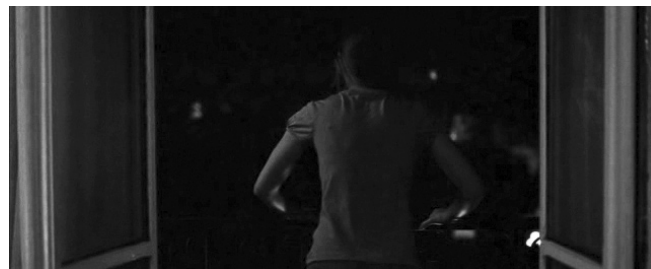
Like much of the *cinéma du corps*, *Des filles en noir* resonates with pent-up anger, corporeal and social estrangement. A brief preface opens the film, introducing Noémie (Elise Lhomeau), a teenaged girl in tears in her bedroom, reaching for a craft knife. After this suicide attempt fails,

Like much of the cinéma du corps, Des filles en noir resonates with pent-up anger, corporeal and social estrangement.

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 institutionalized, 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 nightmare while alone at night in a Grenoble hotel room, walks in a series of long takes to the balcony of her window, as if finally to kill herself, but then just barely, wordlessly, manages to stand her ground.

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 combative and uncompromising. Take, for example, the following three related cases: Gaspar Noé touted an avant-garde ancestry, especially drawn from 1970s flicker films such as Paul Sharits's *T,O,U,C,H,I,N,G* (1968), for the genesis of *Irreversible*; Claire Denis described herself as a formalist experimenter, supplanting the words of scripts with images and sounds on *Trouble Every Day* and *L'Intrus* ([*The Intruder*] 2004); and Bruno Dumont declared *Twenty-nine Palms* (2003) and *Hadewijch* (2009) to be philosophical tracts, distillations of humanity's enduring precivilized instincts, fractured representations of spirituality versus corporeality (Palmer, *Brutal Intimacy* 58-61). In his various roles as instructor, cineaste, and writer-director, Civeyrac has outlined similarly refined conceptual ambitions for *Des filles en noir*, which emerges, in turn, as a culmination of Civeyrac's

work as an applied cinephile: first as a student, then, for more than a decade, as a lecturer at La Fémis, the most prestigious film school in Paris, whose graduates are now dispersed throughout the modern French film industry. From a practical standpoint, Civeyrac argues that he and his disciples want to revive the most exacting parameters of masters past, notably Robert Bresson, but also Jean Cocteau, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, and Pier Paolo Pasolini. From a personal artistic perspective, Civeyrac has also worked in interview to underline his investment in *Des filles en noir*'s controversial subject area by citing a friend at La Fémis who shocked the faculty by committing suicide (Calet n. pag.). Civeyrac's work also resonates theoretically, informed by Impressionist concepts set out in the late 1910s and early 1920s by Delluc, Dulac, and Epstein. The main principle at stake is *photogénie*/photogenesis, which proposes that film has a unique revelatory capacity—that it is photographically predisposed to “revealing the inner nature of things,” and that this revealed inner nature is “untrue to everyday



reality just as everyday reality is untrue to the heightened awareness of poetry” (Epstein, “On Certain Characteristics” 317-318). Summarizing this continuum of references, Jean-Luc Douin goes so far as to claim that Civeyrac's main merit as a filmmaker is his investment in, and resurrection of, cinema heritage (22).

From these points of departure, Civeyrac configures a conceptually precise aesthetic that is founded, above all, by an exacting emphasis on performance. As Dominique Widemann puts it, Civeyrac is “a cineaste of bodies and their languages” (19). Civeyrac's rationale, moreover, contextualizes the opaque screen psychology of his lead roles—a *cinéma du corps* staple—by way of his demanding casting



process (which required a full year of screen tests) to discover inexperienced “virginal” actors, Lhomeau and Tissier. Civeyrac chose this duo by applying Impressionist doctrine to Bressonian methodology in order to pursue their innate authentic *photogénie*: an essence distilled not from narrative exposition but through exhausting sessions of protracted rehearsals and multiple takes (frequently scores of digital video set-ups) that ultimately reveal, when the actors are pushed to physical breaking point, what Civeyrac describes as “the personhood behind the personality . . . we must believe that these girls are burning from the inside” (Calet n. pag.). Hence Noémie and Priscilla's inexorable compulsions to self-harm are conceived less as blatant social or political indictments than as the culmination of cinematic imperatives; these formal and artistic abstractions are the commitments of an applied cinephile. Amplifying this stylistic process is Civeyrac's collaboration with his cinematographer, Hichame Alaouié. Like Éric Gautier's photography for Olivier Assayas (another of Civeyrac's citations), *Des filles en noir*'s aesthetic exists perpetually *in medias res*. Establishing shots are removed in favour of meandering anamorphic medium close-ups consisting of shallow-focus Steadicam tracking shots. The two girls' faces and upper bodies float, adrift, as if fundamentally disconnected from the indistinct diegetic spaces around them: dismal school corridors, grey parks, busy shopping malls, hospital corridors, cramped apartments in unlovely tower blocks (Jones 217-219). Editing his scenes together, Civeyrac cuts and bridges shots on the focal point of the girls themselves, as if their corporeal connection is the only meaningful diegetic current, the only source of energy that exists.

Civeyrac trains the viewer, in turn, to scour the frame for microcurrents, tiny instances of *photogénie* that constitute the two girls' course toward annihilation. This design

Noémie and Priscilla's inexorable compulsions to self-harm are conceived less as blatant social or political indictments than as the culmination of cinematic imperatives.

again revives Epstein's theory that cinema's vocation is to capture inchoate ephemera, to render the intricacies of close-ups as profound disclosures: “[T]he mouth which is about to speak and holds back, the gesture which hesitates between right and left, the recoil before the leap, and the moment before the landing, the becoming, the hesitation, the taut spring” (“Magnification” 236). As Jonah Horwitz interprets such logic, Epstein's “prizing of liminality . . . implies that the merest suggestion of feeling at the limit of perceptibility is both more moving and more photogenic than an overt, dynamic expression of feeling” (116). Early on, for instance, we study Noémie in long take, post-suicide attempt, as she wanders in and out of frame while her mother, off-screen, chides her to get ready for school. Hints at Noémie's disposition cover her bedroom walls: a gloomy but generic teenaged *mise en scène* of rough sketches, art prints, a Heath Ledger still, the cover of Joy Division's infamous LP, *Unknown Pleasures*; there is even a model raven by the window that distantly evokes the Gothicism of Edgar Allan Poe. Civeyrac's focal point, though, is Lhomeau's brittle body language: the distended cast of her glassy facial features, beads of sweat that punctuate her pallid skin, and the quick snaps she takes from a burning cigarette, gestures

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 stasis 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, critiques this treatment as "auteurist evasions," in which "deviant" behaviours are excised from any defined social context. Like many similar dismissals, 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 photogénie 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. Thence arises, like many abiding interests of other *cinéma du corps* filmmakers, Civeyrac's caustic, 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 Rollet 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 Companéez's *Faustine et le bel été* (1972), Liliane de Kermadec's *Aloïse* (1975), and Nelly Kaplan's *Néa* (1976); it was then popularized further by Diane Kurys's commercial crossover success, *Diablo Menthe* ([*Peppermint Soda*] 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 furore over Breillat's similarly dispassionate, and ultimately seminal, *Romance* in 1999. 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 sensorial stimuli that lack prejudicial adult filtering.

Today, the female-focused coming-of-age template, in which girls precariously advance into adulthood, embattled but ultimately empowered, is a constant not only in French film production, but also in how that filmmaking is paraded on 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 *La Naissance des pieuvres* ([*Water Lilies*]



2007) and *Tomboy* (2011), Sophie Letourneur's *La Vie au ranch* (2009), Rebecca Zlotowski's *Belle épine* (2010), Kattell Quillévéré's *Un Poison violent* ([*Love Like Poison*] 2010), Mia Hansen-Løve's *Un Amour de jeunesse* ([*Goodbye First Love*] 2011), Emmanuelle Millet's *La Brindille* (2011), Delphine and Muriel Coulin's *17 filles* (2011), Isabelle Czajka's *D'amour et d'eau fraîche* ([*Living on Love Alone*] 2011), and, in a more commercially mainstream direction, Sophie Lelouche's *Paris-Manhattan* (2012). These films are the backdrop, the stimulus, for much of *Des filles en noir*'s diegetic world. Whereas such films are seldom triumphalist, nor without melancholia, 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 categorically inverts this paradigm into *cinéma du corps* entropy—Noémie and Priscilla's coming-of-age trajectory unravels them, 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 sociodomes-

ticures, 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 Telecom 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 Lhomeau 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 understated but truly nihilistic extension: 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? 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



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 Guilloux ascribes to such shots a "painful tenderness . . . [a regard] which never amounts to naturalism and its sociological pretensions" [n. pag.]) places the girls both within and without this social space, attuned to but excommunicated from the adult world around them. Civeyrac's frame scans seemingly innocent ephemera—a couple happily reunited, a businessman reading a paper, lunch orders issued—which juxtapose with the girls' sober but aghast commentary: "She's afraid to be alone"; "He's only hitting on her to screw her"; "The worst thing is we're already like them." The disjunctions amplify through an ingeniously mixed soundtrack of grating acoustic shards—tinny vocals from adjacent music, noise from a pinball table, the clatter of cutlery, irritating conversational babble—that disproportionately accompanies the girls' passage through the café. These sounds make them, and us, uncomfortable conduits to this detritus of the everyday, a prosaic diegetic world reconfigured as insidious, engulfing, menacing (this heightened stimuli or sensory overload is also apparent in *Dans ma peau*, a proximate *cinéma du corps* text; Marina de Van uses a similarly designed sequence, set in a supermarket and shopping mall, as a prelude to her protagonist's main bout of self-mutilation). Before another long, funereal fade to black, the sequence ends on Noémie, eyes averted, saying blankly, "You have to be a genius to escape this shit." Priscilla responds, "I'm no genius, I never will be." Noémie's

... 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?

last line is, "Me neither." This, then, is the enervating perceptual process at the film's core, a dynamic Louis Guichard describes as a "cold cocoon enclosing adolescence, barring [its protagonists] from access to life" (n. pag.). Much of Civeyrac's previous work, especially *Fantômes* (2001) and *À travers la forêt* ([*Through the Forest*] 2005), interweaves supernaturally ghosts with the living, the present with the past; but now it is as if the dead and the alive have somehow coalesced, cancelled each other out, manifesting from the girls' perspective as this army of drones going blindly about its business, an acquisitive and routinized existence that passes for life. And in the *cinéma du corps* of *Des filles en noir* and *Dans ma peau*, reaching this awareness is the precondition for self-harm.

The *cinéma du corps* nonetheless does retain tiny glimmers of hope, a vestigial capacity to survive peaceably within this world. Usually overlooked by critics, such moments, like the gentle Paris apartment love scene between Vincent Cassel and Monica Bellucci near the climax of *Irreversible*, are all the more compelling for their fragility, their fleeting calm in the face of near-constant diegetic unrest. So comes *Des filles en noir*'s concluding sequence, one of Civeyrac's most moving and exquisite applied cinephile designs. Five shots that run just over four minutes summarize

the film's trajectory from internalized horror and recoil to stasis, consolidation, and perhaps the distant prospect of something more. Noémie wakes up, gasping, from a recurrent nightmare in which she seeks but cannot find Priscilla in a fog; she moves to her balcony window and we see her 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 stilled 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 Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (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 beatific empathy in the midst of ubiquitous suffering and calamity. Civeyrac's finale, a cinematic tapestry of the face, inspired Serge Kaganski, 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 shot, the filming 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. Modelled 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 disgorges lyrically affective fragments within some of the most uncompromisingly stark works in contemporary world cinema.

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Kiva Reardon

Subject Slaughter

Ideally, these should be read simultaneously. Though just as we cannot live being both consciously aware of our interiority and exteriority—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, inoclusive invagination) 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, as when we become aware of our material bodies in their involuntary and uncanny palpitations, cause moments of rupture. In these 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 Sobchack 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 fractured 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 orientation, 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 indeterminate 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 effects” 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 “The Big Toe,” he notes humanity’s “hatred of the still painfully perceptible frenzy of the bloody palpitations of the body [as] [m]an willingly imagines himself to be like the God Neptune” (22). The moments when our bodies assert themselves through these involuntary palpitations 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 “base materialism.” A radical reconceptualization of materiality, base materialism not only shatters hierarchical notions of the material (Noyes 499), but also the fantasy of the unified subject. It is this (productive) crisis that is at the heart—pardon the bodily evocation—of *À l’intérieur*.

À l’intérieur overflows with moments of the abject (from vomit and blood to literally rendering the interior exterior) and abuses the most vulnerable of bodies: a pregnant woman and a fetus. It should be noted that this paper, and indeed the film, takes this to be a body and not a spirit or child. Indeed, the choice in *À l’intérieur* to push the limits and the borders of bodies themselves, as well as to examine the effects of this on the subject, is central to its aim in examining new extremities. In considering Julia Kristeva’s work on the abject and Bataille’s “base materialism” it shall be argued the film enacts a form of subject slaughter, based on encountering the abject material body. Moreover, in a manner that further dovetails with Kristeva’s work, the film doubles this anxiety in evoking the abject in not only its expelled material forms (blood, vomit) but in further exploring the maternal body as the locus of the abject. The

recalling the very presence of our material bodies and at the same time our paradoxical distance from them. What does my liver look like? My intestines? My heart? The body is reduced to a tool, part of labour, as we repress its materiality to not become consumed in its endless and perpetual functioning. To think of the body’s materiality is to be trapped in an endless present.

Just as we stumble over an unknown word, tripping the flow of a sentence, disorienting
o u r
u ndersta ndin g
of

**t-i-m-e[s-p-a-c-e]a-n-d[s-p-a-c-e]
s-p-a-c-e[s-p-a-c-e]t-h-e[s-p-a-c-e]
b-o-d-y’s[s-p-a-c-e]m-a-t-e-r-i-a-
l-i-t-y[s-p-a-c-e]b-r-e-a-k-s[s-p-a-
c-e]o-u-r[s-p-a-c-e]c-o-m-m-o-n[s-p-
a-c-e]e-x-p-e-r-i-e-n-c-e[s-p-a-c-e]
o-f[s-p-a-c-e]r-e-a-l-i-t-y[p-e-r-i-
o-d]**

Instead of: “I see” the relationship becomes: “How do I see?” The object before us no longer matters or exists in our register of consciousness as we become fixated on understanding the rapid darts 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, maimed,
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 body’s nervous system is a two-directional highway be-
tween pleasure and pain, but this does not apply to the eye.*

The eye cannot be caressed, held, or stroked.

film’s final act—The Woman (Beatrice Dalle) cutting the fetus from Sarah’s (Alysson Paradis) womb with a pair of scissors—defies logic not only in its sheer horror but also in its refusal to acknowledge birth, and more specifically, birth as a process that respects the body’s borders. In *À l’intérieur* the subject is not born but *torn* from the womb. In watching this process the coin lands irrational effects side up; like Bataille before the image of a big toe we face our material existence, and are torn as well.

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 immoderate . . . at least assimilable 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 then often treated as subpar, released on genre distribution labels (such is the case with *À l’intérieur* on Dimension Extreme), and, when they are addressed, require prefaces such as this as they are considered to be succumbing “to the elemental—and the elementary” (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 “assimilable.” This paper will thus work within a Bataillian form of Surrealism to suggest a generative discussion of subject-hood is at play, a credit that, while Quandt may not agree, it fundamentally deserves. Our

establishing shot is 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 I was thus
there I am.
Relocated.

The eye’s pleasure possibility is not found in physical contact as the eye’s 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 **e-y-e**, without linear cohesive meaning as we focus on its task (“Formless” 27)—to see—which locates us in the panicked formless present.

“To declare, on the contrary, that the universe is not like anything, and is simply formless, is tantamount to saying the universe is something like a spider of spittle” (ibid).

We lose sense of the form of our bodies and grasp them to reveal that our insides are predicated on at the very least pain, at the very worst death.

But we start inside.

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:

I want to know where
and what I once was.
But cannot.

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 8)—around which we may frame Julia Kristeva’s notion of the abject. The abject is not merely an object but “is radically excluded and draws [us] towards the place where meaning collapses” (2). It is thus a *spatially* disorienting affect 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 tactilely 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 tactilely 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 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 expounded. In claiming “the big toe is the most human part of the human body” (20), Bataille forces us to recall “the bellowing waves of the viscera, in more or less incessant inflation and upheaval [which] brusquely put an end to [our] dignity” (22). The abject and base materialism then rely not only on a sense of violence, or at the very least turbulence, but they both produce *spatially disorienting* affects predicated on material encounters, a point that shall be returned to in regard to *À l’intérieur*’s conclusion.

It is the loss of the self at the intersection of the base and erotic that Bataille’s novels, such as *The Story of the Eye*, evoke in pornographic prose. In his final work, *The Tears*

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 it 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. Hers 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.

Sarah’s is a body that is neither menstrual nor maternal. The pregnant body neither bleeds nor is it yet maternal, for the maternal body relies on the process of birth, of

rupture
expulsion
formation

of Eros, however, the relationship is explicitly explored in his writing on encountering images of the erotic and death. As J.M. Lo Duca notes in the introduction, Bataille’s interest centres on “the last instant in which one must shatter the powers of eternity” (4). These moments are found in images of torture, both for the victim *and* for those who willingly gaze upon the body being destroyed before them (5). This relationship is often thought of in terms of sadism (Bataille himself cites Marquis de Sade) and the erotic economy of the gaze, but here we may focus the question on the body itself when considering the “last instant.” The last instant is not only a threshold point (a new extremity) but also the point where the fantasy of mastery over our bodies becomes a reality in the rush and then final cessation of those “bloody palpitations” with death. 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, where the eternity of pain stretches out beyond time and space, testing thresholds. This pain, however, is never far from titillation as we move from “sensuous pleasure, from madness, to a horror without limits” (*Tears* 20).

The closest we come to this in lived experience is encountering the material body under duress, where the eternity of pain stretches out beyond time and space, testing thresholds. This pain, however, is never far from titillation as we move from “sensuous pleasure, from madness, to a horror without limits” (*Tears* 20). Thus, it is a body that marks not sensuous desire and eroticism but work, and no longer “the moment of sexual union [which when] first came to be related to conscious desire by human beings, the end sought was pleasure; it was the intensity, the violence of pleasure” (*Tears* 44). The pregnant body then becomes the signifier of civilization and propagation, the continual deferral of death as the end result of the sexual union was not “little death” (*Tears* 45) but continued life, the creation of a new subject with birth. Lying prone on the stairs, Sarah begins to give birth, aided by The Woman who looms over her. When the fetus becomes stuck in the birth canal The Woman takes a pair of scissors, cutting away the bloodied cloth of Sarah’s nightgown, layer by layer, until finally exposing her stomach. After rubbing it gently, she inserts the scissors into Sarah’s belly button and begins to cut. This is not the first moment of penetration.

Earlier in the film The Woman traces the same scissors over Sarah’s stomach as she sleeps, until it catches on the edge of her belly button. Lingering for a second she then raises her arm in the air, plunging the scissors into Sarah’s body. This second penetration, however, functions differently in that it is not only clearly “torture that obviously could have no other outcome than death” (*Tears* 185), but further revels in Sarah’s orgasm-like screams.

She is coming;
the baby is coming;
we are coming;
all are lost.

*I associate the moon with the
vaginal blood of mothers, sisters,
that is, the menstrual with their
sickening stench . . .*
(*Story of the Eye* 49)

The body within becoming the *bodies* without.

Sarah’s stomach is both a visual bump and a logical one. As we stare at her distended body on the doctor’s table the cues are those which start an involuntary chain of signifiers from

belly>baby>sex>vagina.

Sarah’s body becomes a bearer of semiotic meaning that conflates contradictory impulses and associations as we move from thinking of sensual sex, to reproductive sex, the pleurably 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 sensuous desire and eroticism but work, and no longer “the moment of sexual union [which when] first came to be related to conscious desire by human beings, the end sought was pleasure; it was the intensity, the violence of pleasure” (*Tears* 44). The pregnant body then becomes the signifier of civilization and propagation, the continual deferral of death as the end result of the sexual union was not “little death” (*Tears* 45) but continued life, the creation of a new subject with birth. Lying prone on the stairs, Sarah begins to give birth, aided by The Woman who looms over her. When the fetus becomes stuck in the birth canal The Woman takes a pair of scissors, cutting away the bloodied cloth of Sarah’s nightgown, layer by layer, until finally exposing her stomach. After rubbing it gently, she inserts the scissors into Sarah’s belly button and begins to cut. This is not the first moment of penetration.

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 forcible 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 materialism, are rooted in “a calculation of pleasure” (ibid), motivated for or production. In this moment *À l’intérieur* releases the repressed through violation it renders birth for The Woman this pleasure is us, it is in the pleasure of watching, 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 wielded 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 like inside as it opens make space where there should be none let me see

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ic desire in *À l’intérieur* is not that that when faced with the inside of away. This is the moment of little ment—which is located outside of in the Lacanian sense to be what **n-d]s-p-a-c-e** we are then the abject are not *them* but *us*. Me. tear (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

formless place, like the womb, which resists spatial orientation and lacks atmosphere, both of which are necessary for narrative. While the lack of form has already been discussed, here atmosphere (both in its scientific and figurative sense) becomes important. The womb literally lacks atmosphere in that it is a space not surrounded by a gaseous envelop, as per scientific definition. Figuratively, atmosphere is predicated on a sense of environs that gives over to a mood, which may be then expressed with language. Most importantly, however, atmosphere is predicated on a sense of penetration and fluid boundaries. Relationships between two or more spaces interpenetrate and are further altered by the subject’s interplay and entry into them (as is said: the atmosphere of the room changed when she entered it). The atmosphereless space, by contrast, does not interact with another. It is the space of fixed boundaries and in being sealed from the world around it escapes language. This has radical implications if we consider Ludwig Wittgenstein: “To imagine a language means to imagine a form of life” (qtd. in Jameson 8) or Bataille: “Indeed, for the academics to be happy, the universe would have to take on form” (“Formless” 27). By extension, the atmosphereless space, such as the womb, defies both language and conceptualization. The paradox here is that the womb is what brings us to life. The rupture of this sealed space (birth) is what brings us into subject-hood via encounters with structuring space outside of the body. In *À l’intérieur* this is negated, as the violated birth does not give way to a sense of location; rather, the closing image suggests that in opening the womb The Woman, and indeed we, have retreated back into it. It is thus not a birth into language and order but a (re)birth into the abject, structureless space without subject. This is a birth that does not escape or break from the body, but rather one that enters back into it. Faced with Sarah’s torn maternal body and the dislocated shot of The Woman, we drown in the blood that pours over the staircase from Sarah’s body, carried away and beyond the very frame of the film itself to an unknown space within ourselves: inside. And yet this loss of the subject is not nihilistic. Indeed, reading Bataille as such is simplistic as he says: “I can live in the hope of a better

future. But I can still project this future into another world. A world into which I can be introduced only by death” (*Tears* 19). *À l’intérieur* is this “other world” where birth becomes not merely productive labour but an affirmation of life through violation and negation of atmosphere, narrative and subject: it is birth into material consciousness. For in the final instant when we are caught between the erotic and death we encounter “horror without limits” and “the end of reason” (20). Here, in these new extremities, we encounter life. Here the body and subject are not predicated on boundaries but rather a radical union. We become enfolded into ourselves, an invaginated subject, having given over to the realization that we have not relinquished control over ourselves but accepted that we never had control to begin with. We are left “screaming, opening eyes wide” (“The Big Toe” 23) asking:

Where am I?

Alive.

Author’s Note: *The motivation for this paper was twofold. First, as the final paper for a seminar on French surrealism, the aim was to address content through form, an experiment in working outside of the traditional structure of academic writing. (On this note, I must thank Professor James Cahill at the University of Toronto, who encouraged me to take such a risk.) Second, the piece straddles the academic and the poetic; it attempts to grapple with that which cannot be rationalized, and questions the place of affective reactions to cinema in critical thought. One half of the paper is a theoretical approach to *À l’intérieur*, while the other is a free-form attempt at capturing an experience of watching the film. By joining the two, the hope was to find a means for addressing affect and bodily experience in critical thought, especially in French new extremist films, which seek to incite such reactions.*

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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



1960]) and off (specifically, Nazi Germany and its documented horrors), that the Grand Guignol eventually saw its decline.

Despite this decline, traces of the Grand Guignol still loom in contemporary culture. While the Grand Guignol is largely ignored by the academic world, its role in influencing popular entertainment, most notably the horror film, should not go unnoticed. Renowned horror writer, filmmaker, and artist Clive Barker has acknowledged his own debt to the Grand Guignol, which not only inspired many imitators in its own time, but also “has arguably influenced everything from the Expressionist movement of the silent German cinema to the gore films of Herschell Gordon Lewis and others” (114). According to Barker, there have been multiple attempts to resurrect the Grand Guignol in North America over the years, and while these attempts have proven to be unsuccessful, “its legacy is still with us” (114). While a direct link between the Grand Guignol and new extremism may be tenuous, an evolution of transgressive entertainment can be traced from the Grand Guignol through to the splatter films of Lewis, the slasher films of the 1980s, right up to the torture porn and new extremist

films of the twenty-first century. All of these films focus their energies on appealing to the basest 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 gratuitous sex and explicit violence simulate reality with detailed accuracy, blending practical and computer-generated effects. These new technologies satiate the desire for Horeck and Kendall’s “newness” while allowing for the aforementioned “purgation 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 view 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 know-

ingly. 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 is learned” (4). Pain 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 real pain and suffering, then simulated images 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

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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 perverse simulations of sex and violence to be found at the turn of the twentieth century. Gordon notes that the theatre has always 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 “purgation and fear,” through which spectators can safely experience heinous acts. Gordon also comments on the lack of crime on the streets of Paris during the heyday of the Grand Guignol in juxtaposition to Nazi Germany, where censorship eradicated theatre and film, leaving nothing to curb the violent appetites of the masses (49). This would suggest that the mere exposure to simulated violence has the power to

While the theatre situated itself within the naturalist tradition ... the spectator's role as both witness and willing participant intensified the horror and heightened affective response.

curb potentially violent intent and eruptive behaviour. Violence will always exist, but by allowing audiences to watch realistic simulations of violent spectacles, the consequences of violence are readily exposed.

New extremist filmmakers assault the senses of their audiences: "reports of fainting, vomiting and mass walkouts have consistently characterized the reception of this group of art-house films whose brutal and visceral images appear designed deliberately to shock or provoke the spectator" (Horeck and Kendall 1). Many extreme filmmakers boast of audience walkouts and angry responses to their films. Potential viewers are repelled and/or intrigued when hearing of such controversies, and oftentimes approach these films for the simple reason that others cannot. Viewing becomes both an active choice and a challenge to all previous images that the spectator has encountered.

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 as a form of advertising. Doctors were said to be on site to revive anyone if needed. The back alley of the theatre was regularly filled with vomiting individuals and hyper-ventilating couples. In one case, a new record was set after fifteen people fainted during a scene simulating a realistic blood transfusion (Gordon 28). Vomit and fake blood were not the only fluids flowing; the Grand Guignol was steeped in eroticism. Evidence of sexual arousal and its subsequent release could be found on the seats and in the private viewing boxes located at the back of the theatre. As much as audiences accepted the unreality of theatrical performance, it was imperative for successful viewing that they suspended their disbelief, "and, therefore, by their shocked reactions [they] unconsciously assisted in the life-like presentations of grisly murders, torture, corporeal mutilation, and bleeding wounds" (Gordon 44). The storylines and the execution of violent effects were key to realism in Grand Guignol performance.

Both the Grand Guignol and the new extremist films stray far away from supernatural explanations when it comes to the causation of violence. Many of the Grand Guignol

plays were originally based on *fait divers*, which were articles of real crimes accompanied by graphic illustrations that focused on primitive, animal passions (Gordon 10). 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 proscenium 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 sleight 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); and 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 Maxa, 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.

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 (*Dans ma Peau* [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.

We now have the chance to see overt simulations of decapitations and dismemberment (*Haute Tension* [Alexandre Aja 2003]); torture and flaying (*Martyrs* [Pascal Laugier 2008]); excruciating, uncut rape scenes (*Irreversible*); unsettling, yet somewhat erotic, self-mutilation (*Dans ma Peau*); at-home cesarean sections (*A l'interieur* [Alexandre Bustillo and Julien Maury 2007]); abortions (*Enter the Void* [Gaspar Noé 2009]); and genital mutilation (*Antichrist*). The body is depicted *in extremis* in the films of new extremism, just as it was in the Grand Guignol; the difference is that now one can see every minute detail of the torture and suffering. It would have been difficult to remain a passive spectator at the Grand Guignol because the horrors depicted onstage demanded active engagement. A similar effect is achieved when viewing new extremist films because everything is visible, and these images, if they are to be regarded as addressing the basest of human emotions, succeed in transcending language due to their graphic nature.

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.

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Timothy Nicodemo

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 poses 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 graphi-

cally 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 twirls 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 *Elephant* [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 Tenia (Jo Prestia), we soon discover their

In Irreversible, specifically, the cinematography conducts a visceral attack on the viewer, ultimately eliciting adverse physical sensations.

mistake: the man they killed was not the rapist at all, and Le Tenia merely watches the murder incredulously, with a sadistic sense of satisfaction. Only with the benefit of omnipresence 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 presently communicated spatial information and stored traces of previous information” (103). Situations, then, that elicit motion sickness

are *all* characterized by a condition in which the motion signals transmitted by the eyes, the vestibular system [the sensory system that most heavily contributes to the sense of balance and spatial orientation] and the nonvestibular proprioceptors [sensory receptors that detect the motion and orientation of one’s own body in space] are at variance with one another, and hence . . . with what is expected on the basis of previ-

ous transactions with the environment. (Brand and Reason 264)

One of the key factors of VIMS, as suggested by Bardy et al., is that ofvection, which is defined as the subjective experience of self-motion relative to the inertial environment as produced by optical simulations of self-motion (2). They further explain this concept by employing the idea of *body sway*—defined as “the slight postural movements made by an individual in order to maintain a balanced position” (Abbott et al. 2225)—suggesting that, through laboratory tests, “optical simulations that mimic the amplitude and frequency of body sway give rise to a *subjective* experience of self-motion” (Bardy et al. 2, emphasis added).

It can be established, then, that a spectator who views a film that produces the illusion of subjective movement can experience motion sickness by way of a clash between one’s expected degree of movement and the simulation of movement that is forced upon them. This might explain why, in Matt Reeves’s science fiction film *Cloverfield* (2008), many spectators reported experiencing bouts of nausea and



vomiting during the film. One doctor explains how 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—misled 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’s-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, and entirely alien environment of the 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 Marks’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

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.

... 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.

the bodily relationship between image and spectator that Marks delineates (164). If we are to locate the importance of this cinematic technique within Palmer’s framework of the *cinéma du corps*, it is evident that Noé focuses on the human body not just on a narrative scale (the vicious beating, the men in the nightclub in general), but integrates the focus on the filmic body into the spectatorial body. For Noé, the body is both subject and object: it is a catalyst for the narrative’s propulsion (subject—Alex’s rape and beating), yet is also treated most inanimately (object—the body is treated as a vessel for violence, drugs, and sex). In a way, the spectator’s body can also be envisaged as such, as we simultaneously are subject by way of direct affect with the film’s various bodies, yet remain object as we are held to witness the acts of cruelty.

If it is the objective of the *cinéma du corps* to pose the human body as its thematic centerpiece, then this can only come to fruition, at least for Noé, when the spectator is physiologically affected by the image as well. It is not enough to simply convey the feelings of disorientation and violence as experienced by the characters: there must also be a direct link established between character and spectator for the fullest extent of verisimilitude. While my examination

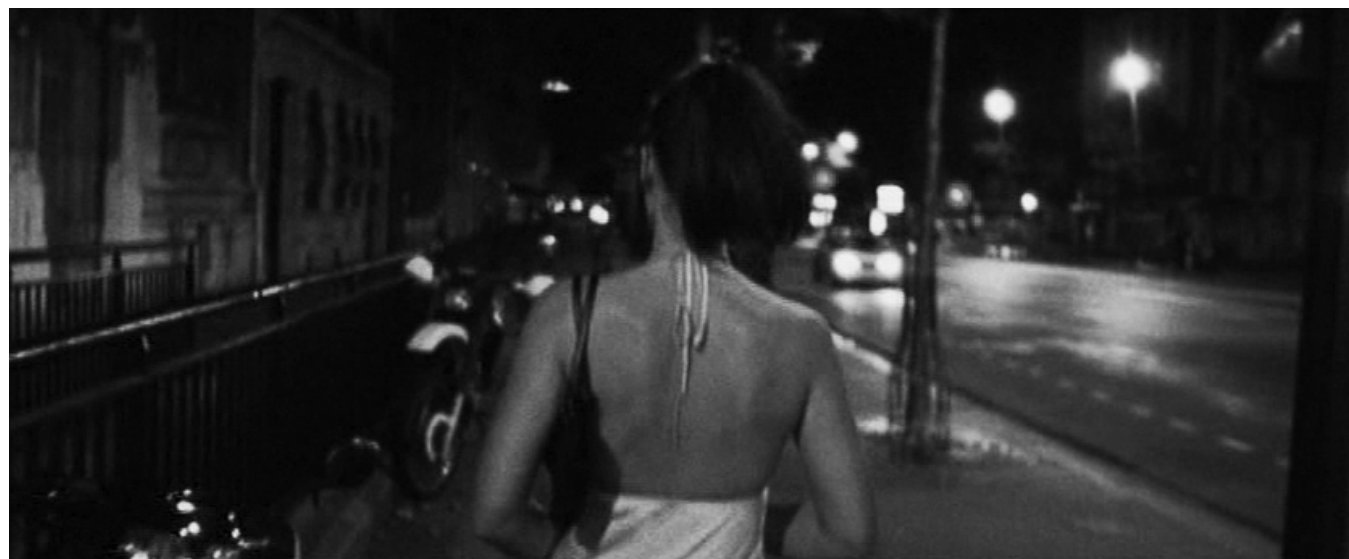
of the cinematography has revolved around perspective, this direct connection can be further examined with a final look at Marks's suggestion that the affection-image can "bring us to the direct experience of time *through* the body" (163). Marks here invokes Deleuze's notion of the movement-image, examining how the haptic image can "be understood as a particular kind of affection-image," as the affection-image "may also force a visceral and emotional contemplation in those any-spaces-whatever divorced from action. . . . Thus the haptic image connects directly to sense perception" (Marks 163). Noé makes his concern with the concept of time evident in a number of ways throughout *Irreversible*: the Butcher from *I Stand Alone* (Gaspar Noé 1998) murmurs, in the opening shot, that time destroys all things ("Le temps détruit tout," also seen on a title card at the film's conclusion); the title itself evokes the irreversibility of time, which is mimicked as a framing device for the film (the narrative's sequence of events are shown in reverse chronological order); the sequences are each filmed in one take and subsequently edited together to give the illusion of seamless transitions; and finally, the experience of time is linked to Noé's presentation of the body, with two specific moments demarcating his aesthetic as not only constituting a cinema of tactility, but also of human phenomenology.

In the Rectum sequence just examined, I focused on the movement of the camera, and furthermore, on its inability to cease movement: it twists, turns, and lurches, never slowing down. This is the case, at least, until the sequence's most graphic burst of violence occurs, beginning initially with Marcus having his arm snapped by the man he and Pierre believe to be Le Tenia. Pierre appears behind the man, who is preparing to sodomize a semi-conscious Marcus, and begins to pummel him in the face with a fire extinguisher, long after the man has ceased to consciously

respond to the attacks. It is the first time in the film that the camera becomes largely stationary: it only tilts up and down slightly to follow the trajectory of the extinguisher, and spins only once in the middle of the attack. Settling on the ground beside the man, the upward angle allows us to not only witness, but to receive Pierre's attacks as the extinguisher's bludgeons land on the man's face beside the camera. This, again, engages a form of indirect subjectivity with the spectator, but here it makes clear the importance of temporality and its connection with bodily experience. It is a moment when the viewer is not only physically disturbed by the act of violence itself, but also through the fact that he/she is forced to endure it for its entire duration, without ellipses, cutaways, or movement to aestheticize the violence.

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 last few seconds of the atrocity, and the biology of death by crushed skull is laid out in detail" (n. pag.).



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 stasis of the camera 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

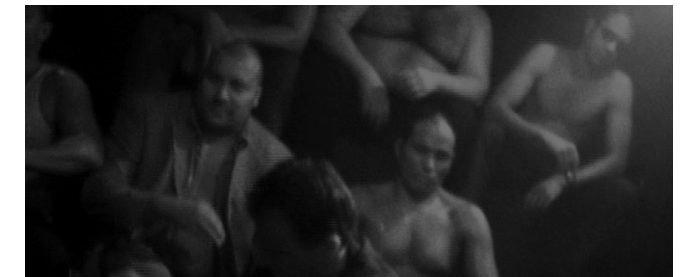


and screen there lies a voyeuristic gaze, the normally private element of sex now dismantled through the spectator's own act of intrusion; this is emphasized when we catch a glimpse of a passerby wandering into the tunnel from the opposite end, only to stop short upon the viewing of the act, and back out without offering any form of support for Alex. In this sense of voyeurism, 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 anxiety 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 silhouette 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

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 research. In his review of *Irreversible*, David Edelstein comments that the camera "leers" at Bellucci, with Noé "on the verge of implying that such quivering ripeness 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* (Meir Zarchi 1981), "the new horror films encouraged audience identification

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 "excruciating . . . 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. Hoberman notes that the " nastiness lasts eight minutes but feels *far longer*. Having found its meat at last, Noé's camera stops turning cartwheels and settles down to *masticate* upon the unsavory spectacle" (n. pag., emphasis added).

There are yet many more reviews and articles referring to the rape sequence in much the same way. 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.



tion of the sequence, often noting its significance as a static long take. As a critic for *USA Today* suggests, Noé “[experiments] both with time frame and audience tolerance” (Clark n. pag.), the two inevitably informing one another: the standard Hollywood procedures of editing are broken, the temporality of the image now akin to that of avant-garde cinema, whereby experimenting with duration can be traced back to the structural film tradition of the early 1960s, of which Andy Warhol’s early usage of the static

... 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” (Sitney 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-realists as examples, and argued that techniques such as the long take were preferable to this end over montage editing. Noé exemplifies realist filmmaking through his treatment of the two sequences contemplated herein that focus on the human body, as well as through his goal to affect the viewer on a physiological level. Gregory Currie comments on the long take and realism, suggesting that the former “enhances our ability to detect spatial and temporal properties of the fiction by using the capacity we have to detect those properties of things in the real world” (107). By its

nature, the long take emphasizes “the sense of passionate contemplation . . . [of] reality . . . an unmediated openness to the world” (Le Fanu n. pag.). It could be argued that not only the two sequences mentioned above, but also other, non-violent sequences from the film work to the effect of attacking the viewer, such as the explicit sexual discussion between Pierre, Marcus, and Alex on the subway, whose 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.

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Peter Schuck

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 Trebs), the handyman's apprentice. A television newscast reveals that the vi-

rus 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



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 perform what I will refer to as *movement*, a gestural state in which standstill and motion simultaneously occur. In this way, *Rammbock* transposes the visceral extremism common to European horror cinema from the corporeal to the pictorial level: splattering images—for example, the human form fragmented by the close-ups and montages created by the camera—materialize into splattered, torn-apart bodies.

Speed: the Jump-cut as Upper

Rammbock primarily depicts situations of confinement and inactivity, but when the action scenes do occur, they follow the convention of accelerated attack that is employed by contemporary European zombie films. This is apparent not only in the accelerated motion of the zombies themselves, but also in the staccato of cinematic cuts and high-speed montage that—similar to the way in which Derrida's *pharmakon* simultaneously hurts and heals—concurrently interrupt movement and hasten action. The speed produced through jump-cuts and montage interrupts the phi effect of film that effaces the gaps between photographic images

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and creates the illusion of motion in 24 frames per second. The furious staccato of fragmented images interrupts *Rammbock's* mise en scène, which otherwise unfolds slowly in much the same way as Romero's zombie films, in which minimalistic cutting creates a slowed-down, "empty temporality" consisting of suspended action (Shaviro 99). The jump-cut aesthetics suggest the camera's ability to fragment 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 leap from one still image to another in fragments—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 crisis of 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 (311). Disoriented and convulsing uncontrollably, the zombie blasts conventions of movement into an entropy of gestures.

The few scenes in *Rammbock* that feature zombie attacks employ a strategy similar to that of *28 Days Later*, described by Arno Meteling as decreasing the number of images and increasing the number of cuts in order to bestow a staccato-like movement upon the infected (150). *Rammbock's* infected are associated with montage and fast camera movements, their bodies accelerated and fragmented through a staccato of cuts. Conversely, the film's survivors are represented through mise en scène, slow camera movements, and minimal cutting that reflects their lack of mobility in a confined situation. The two modes of representation outlined above align *Rammbock's* infected with

1. See Benjamin, Walter.
2. See Kristeva, Julia.

the photographic image and its survivors with the cinematic one. The decreased number of images and the increased number of cuts employed to portray the infected produce sequences that, although faster, are closer to a series of photographic images.

Static and unmoving, the photographic image is ontologically closer to death than its cinematic counterpart. As André Bazin notes in *Was ist Film?* [*What is Cinema?*], the photograph is the antidote for the passing of time, not accelerating, but mortifying the captured moment; film, on the other hand, performs the (simulated) resurrection of the photographically mortified moment into a series of images, a mummification of time. A metacinematographic effect of zombies is thus to show how film works to resurrect photographic images into a series that simulates movement.

In *Rammbock*, the infected embody a central paradox of the cinematic apparatus: they perform acceleration through interruption. Indeed, their movements are strikingly similar to a series of photos viewed through a magic lantern. In this way, the infected photographically accelerate 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 motion 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 Terentius 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 ac-

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



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, *movement* 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 aporia. 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 *movement*. The process of recovery begins with Michael and Harper breaking into the elderly woman's apartment with a battering ram. Walls 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 cap-



tivity, their failure to fully realize 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 *movement*. 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.

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 *movement*. 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 *moving* series of photographs in which they were introduced during the opening credits.

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

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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 flashlight 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 *movement*. What was previously suggested in the flickering cuts of the zombie attacks is now powerfully expressed through the flash-cut darkness. The sequence clearly depicts the infected as a series of disconnected pho-

tographic images. The darkness that surrounds them signifies the gaps between the cadres of the film and cuts down successful cinematic motion to movement. The jump-cuts that previously brought the infected close to photography are, in *Rammbock's* final sequence, completely exchanged with photographic images.

Breaking the Frames: *Rammbock* Reread

The acts of taking photos and breaking through the elderly woman's wall achieve the same results: they not only provide a way out for the survivors, but also a way in for the infected. Simultaneously exit and entrance, sedative and stimulant, and encouraging the medium of film while returning it to its origins in photography, the traces of the photographic dispositive in *Rammbock* are structurally identical with the ontology of its zombies. The infected are depicted as undecidedly moving between photography and



film, sedation and stimulation, inside and outside; they are accelerated by interruption and stimulated by sedation. The film thereby extracts the gesturally sustained breakdown of the sensory-motor link and employs the infected as its origin, emblem, and ateleological telos.

The finale, in which Harper and the young woman escape on the bicycle, concentrates the events of the film up to that point. The survivors are confined to an apartment

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.

complex and courtyard whose architecture resembles a Roman gladiator arena. While many of the zombie attacks occur in the building's hallways and suites, a good many can also be witnessed through the windows of the apartments facing the courtyard, with the windows framing the events in the same way as a theatre's proscenium arch. The distant position of the spectators as they watch the events of the courtyard self-reflexively mirrors the way in which an audience watches a film, the detached point of view providing a metaphor for the cinematic distance between film and viewer. From this distant perspective, the movement of *Rammbock's* infected appears to be relatively natural, as they are depicted in a linear fashion as opposed to through a series of jump-cuts.

When that distance is erased, movement becomes movement. As soon as the survivors try to escape, the distance between them and the infected decreases. In the sequence in which Harper and Michael break through the elderly woman's wall, the infected literally break through a screen—Michael and Harper try to stop the resulting hole with an entertainment centre—and attempt to follow the two men into the kitchen. Michael and Harper close the kitchen door, but that only slows the infected, who peer at them angrily through the two small glass windows comprising the upper half of the door. As long as an intact screen existed, Michael and Harper were safe, their possibility to move secured. With the destruction of the screen and the door's glass windows, the image becomes terrifyingly tactile, visibly disrupting the mise en scène. Seen through the windows in the door, the infected resemble framed photographs, thereby referring to the film's photographic origin. When the infected break through those frames and into the kitchen, the photographic image literally breaks through the fluid surface of the moving image.

One can see an even larger frame in the structure of the apartment complex itself, which surrounds the courtyard on all sides. In this giant frame, *Rammbock's* finale becomes a metaphor for breaking the frame of cinema itself. The infected approach Harper and the young woman in flashes, the strobing lights attached to their bicycle simultaneously

interrupting and impelling the attacks. Tearing the skin of the film apart, the photographic dispositive is again stimulant and sedative, a metaphor for movement that results in a burst of terrifyingly circular corrections. Combining the pharmacological effects of its employed objects (two key examples include the battering ram and the photographic camera) with its narrative structure and topic, *Rammbock* develops a performative dimension. 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.

Coda: Photographarmakón, Towards a Politics of Movement

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 gesture, and rupture with rupture. On the one hand, photographic images hasten and disrupt the cinematic phi effect (as a stimulant), while on the other hand, paralleled with sedative medication, they are required to cure the accelerated 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 possible through terrible pain. It is through this understanding of liberation that movement emerges as a political concept, the painful exposition of the aporetic space—the simultaneously therapeutic and toxic space of the *pharmakón*—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 ateleological. 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.

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Dave Alexander

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 Québécois 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.)

Houle notes that many of those making films in Quebec were staunch Catholics, often adapting stories from older works of literature. In a region where filmmakers relied on government grant money to make movies, it is unlikely that a filmmaker would have been able to successfully challenge the status quo. Furthermore, all films were vetted by the Church censorship bureau before they could play in the province's movie theatres.

By the end of the '50s, however, the status quo began to change with the Quiet Revolution. During the fifteen years prior to this, Quebec was governed by Conservative premier Maurice Duplessis and his Union Nationale party, which had strong support from the Roman Catholic Church. Duplessis died while in office in September 1959, and his party was voted out the following year. The Liberal party, led by Jean Lesage, took power, and over the next decade massive changes were enacted that wrested con-

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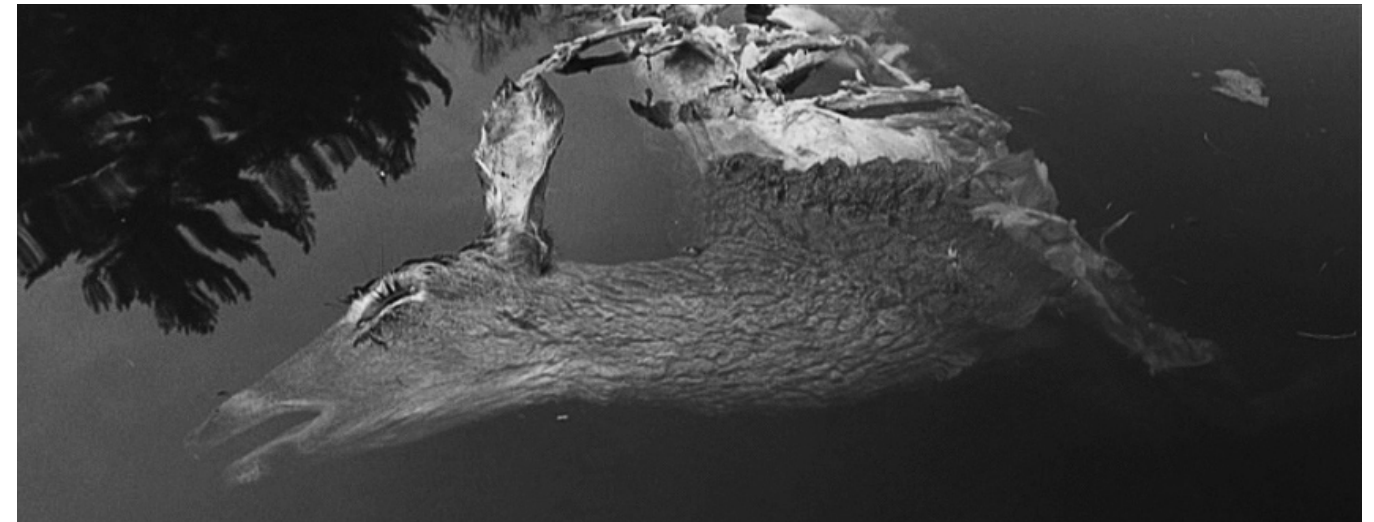
trol away from the Church: the ministries of Health and Education were created and generously funded; schools were secularized and given a standardized curriculum; civil servants were allowed to unionize; and the province took a much larger degree of control over its resources. As for cinema, the increased government presence resulted in a provincial movie ratings system introduced to replace the censorship bureau. These sweeping changes led to increased feelings of nationalism, which fuelled Quebec's separatist movement and in turn were reflected in the content of its films. The Québécois identity was no longer so defined by the Church, and, newly freed from religious censors, the province's filmmakers responded.

Houle notes that "the clergy was supplanted everywhere and Quebec cinema echoed this process," but he adds that even though the Church underwent a significant erosion of its official power within the province, it still had a large hold over the souls of many Québécois, who, having internalized the doctrines, were "[unable] to conceive beyond that frame of reference" (n. pag.). Although clergyman characters largely disappeared from Quebec cinema following the Quiet Revolution, the province's films are still largely obsessed with what Houle identifies as "sin: fault, guilt, and remorse" (n. pag.). (Fault, guilt and remorse also form the thematic foundation of *7 Days*, with a religious fervour that connects the film to Quebec's cinematic past.)

In the early '70s, "[a]fter having tried to define the Québécois culturally and free them from the folkloric and ideological image of French-Canadians," a type of cinema arose that encouraged questions about identity and the influence of Quebec's past on its conflicted present (Houle n. pag.). As the people of Quebec worked towards the formation of a new identity apart from Church and Union Nationale rule, a horrifying revelation was made that involved both the Church and the former government. During the '40s and '50s, Duplessis and the Church devised a plan to reclassify orphans as mental patients in order to obtain federal funding. After a quick, and false, diagnosis officially labelled them "mentally retarded," they were shipped off to asylums, or, in some cases, entire orphanages were given a new classification as mental institutions. These newly "mentally incompetent" children were subjected to mental, physical, and sexual abuse (including electroshock treatment and even lobotomies) at the facilities, which were staffed by not only administrators and psychiatrists, but also priests and nuns. According to survivors—who dubbed themselves "The Duplessis Orphans"—medical experiments performed on children were not uncommon. In documentary footage shot in 2007 for a story in *Freedom* magazine, a former patient forced to work in the morgue at one of the institutions describes his shock at seeing a boy whose skullcap had been taken off and his brain removed. He also recalls transporting the bodies of 67 children from the morgue over a three-month period. Many of the children who died were buried in unmarked graves (described in the footage as "pits") in a field dubbed the "pigsty graveyard."

In the '90s, survivors pressured the Quebec government to compensate them for the ordeal. After an initial offer of \$1,000 per Duplessis Orphan resulted in the government being crucified in the media, an offer of \$10,000 per former patient (plus \$1,000 per year of wrongful incarceration) was accepted, but it only included those who were officially deemed mentally deficient, and made no allowances for those abused physically or sexually. The government refused to hold an inquiry, and the Church refused to issue an apology. The Duplessis Orphans were not the only children who suffered at the hands of the clergy in Quebec: in 2011 the Church agreed to pay up to \$18 million in compensation to 215 victims who were abused between 1950 and 2001 by various clergymen at Montreal's Collège Notre-Dame as well as schools in Pohénégamook and Saint-Césaire. No amount of compensation, however, could erase these traumas from the Québécois consciousness.

If the Quiet Revolution allowed this dark underside of the province's Roman Catholic Church to be revealed, a new generation was there to gaze upon its visage, includ-



ing Senécal and Grou, who were both born in 1967. Often referred to as "the Stephen King of Quebec," Senécal has written a dozen novels, three of which have been adapted into Québécois features. The first was *Sur le seuil* (1998), which was made into a feature of the same name (retitled *Evil Words* in English) in 2003, directed by Éric Tessier, and concerns a popular but tortured writer with the power to make the horrific events that he pens come true. The writer is revealed to have been born as the result of a satanic orgy initiated by a Catholic priest who turned to the devil after the death of his sister. When the head of the cult slaughters his own followers, the other three priests in the rural parish cover it up by burying the bodies in the woods and leaving the baby at an orphanage.

The second adaptation of Senécal's work, *5150 rue des ormes* [*5150 Elm's Way*], also made by Tessier, in 2010, was based on Senécal's first novel of the same name, which was published in 1994. It follows a film student (in the novel he is studying literature) who falls off of his bike while shooting footage of the suburbs for a school project. He seeks help from a seemingly innocuous family man, only to discover a wounded captive inside of the man's house. It turns out that the suburban father is a vigilante who kills drug dealers, pedophiles, and anyone else who he deems "unrighteous." He lives by a strict moral code and cannot kill the protagonist, but also cannot release him, so he makes the young man a prisoner in his house, living in a locked room amidst his similarly warped family, including his violent older daughter and devoutly Catholic wife, who is too afraid to help the boy and eventually commits suicide after allowing her husband to institutionalize their youngest daughter. The men enter into a series of chess games with the young man's freedom at stake, culminating in a final match in the basement of the house involving human-sized chess pieces made out of corpses.

Both films trade heavily in the religious fault, guilt, and remorse that Houle describes, both expose the madness of the devout, and both feature instances of shocking violence—a baby is cut from the womb of a pregnant woman in *Evil Words*, and a young girl is killed by a point-blank shotgun blast in *5150 Elm's Way*—but neither movie blends art house aesthetics with torture porn gore the way that *7 Days* does. While *Evil Words* and *5150 Elm's Way* fit comfortably within the horror/suspense genre, *7 Days* is a much more radical work as it cannot be easily situated within generic boundaries. In this regard it has more in common with European new extremist cinema such as Lars von Trier's *Antichrist* or the films of Gaspar Noé than with previous adaptations of Senécal's works. Indeed, Québécois cinema is often regarded as having a closer connection with European films than with English-Canadian ones. In an article about the influence of the French New Wave on Québécois cinema, Peter Lester argues that

[a]s far as English Canadian cinema, the direct influence is perhaps a little less easily traceable . . . but generally speaking, the French influence is typically more pronounced within the context of Québécois cinema. . . . Since at least the 1950s and 60s there has been a rather close crossover between the cinema of France and that of Quebec. (qtd. in Ho n. pag.)

The similarities are certainly present, but it would be a mistake to contextualize *7 Days* as simply an offshoot or copycat of French new extremist films, as it is firmly situated within, and is a product of, Quebec culture. *7 Days* combines art house techniques such as long, contemplative takes, abstract metaphorical imagery, and a minimalist score with unflinching violence, torture porn gore, explicit nudity, and taboo-breaking imagery, eliciting the visceral affect of new extremist cinema while interrogating particularly Québécois notions of culpability, sin, and remorse.

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, Jasmine (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 pris-



oner 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—via phone calls rerouted through a remote laptop—that he intends to torture and kill Lemaire in the seven days leading up to Jasmine's birthday, and then turn 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 more pain and self-loathing—even after Lemaire admits to other crimes against children, which Hamel exposes to the media, earning him hero status among many of the Québécois watching the story as it develops on television. When the mother of one of the dead children publicly condemns Hamel's actions, he kidnaps her, locks her in a room with Lemaire, and encourages her to follow his example. On the seventh day, Hamel decides to let the mutilated man live and allows himself to be captured. A reporter on the scene asks him if he feels that vengeance is right, to which he answers “no.” The reporter then asks Hamel if he regrets his actions, to which he also replies, “no,” thereby denying viewers the transcendent closure expected from a typical narrative film with such dramatic weight.

Grou establishes from the outset that *7 Days* is not a typical narrative film. In one of the most upsetting scenes in any movie, he slowly tracks across Jasmine's corpse in a close-up. From her bruised head and dead eyes, to her bloodied thighs and the soiled underwear around her ankles, it is a visual assault on the viewer. Asbjørn Grønstad describes the films of Noé and von Trier as

[i]mpossibly violent, they assault their own audience and negate the scopophilic pleasure considered intrinsic to film as an art form. Uncompromising and anti-voyeuristic, they enact a reversal of the relation between film and spectator that historically has defined the cinematic situation—these films compel us to look away. (194)

This description can also apply to *7 Days*: once Hamel has Lemaire, he strips him naked (the state in which the prisoner stays for the remainder of the movie, with his genitalia exposed), shackles him, and begins a regiment of abuses, none of which are depicted as pleasurable for the protagonist or the viewer, despite the graphic portrayal of Jasmine's corpse evoking a desire to see Lemaire pay for his crimes. Hamel smashes the man's knee with a sledgehammer, and Grou does not cut away from the impact: the entirety of the blow is depicted using shockingly realistic special effects. Hamel also urinates on Lemaire, beats him unconscious with a chain, and then operates on him without anesthesia.



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. Lemaire 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 extremism.

There are no overt references to Catholicism in *7 Days*, as there are in *Evil Words* and *5150 Elm Street*; however, one can read the film as a perversion of the Church's imagery and symbolism. The title itself carries Catholic connotations, as the number seven figures prominently in Catholic scripture, including the Seven Corporeal Acts of Mercy and Seven Spiritual Acts of Mercy, the Seven Deadly Sins, the Seven Virtues, the Seven Sacraments, and, most often, the Seven Days of Creation. As such, seven is recognized by Catholics as the number of completeness. Furthermore,

Lemaire, naked, whipped, and at one point restrained to a surgical table placed upright, is depicted as a martyr figure, although this particular martyr is punished for his own sins—or perhaps in the context of the Catholic Church in Quebec, the sins of a system that could allow such a monster to exist. Instead of a spear wound in his side, Lemaire has an asshole hemorrhaging shit. For anyone familiar 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 centerpiece in previous (France) French films in the new extremist 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), they acquire the halo of new moral qualities. Humiliated, resigned, and beaten, they at least have the conviction that they have not left the narrow path of Christian virtue, that they are in the right. (n. pag.)

Hamel is initially positioned in the narrative as a man devout in his mission of revenge; however, he is stricken with what could be considered a Catholic sense of guilt, which leads to a crisis of faith that ultimately causes him to fail in his mission. The Catholic hero of early Québécois cinema does not stray from the path, no matter what, but the modern protagonist, though still subject to a lingering religious guilt (symbolized in the film by the deer carcass that Hamel tries to hide, but that keeps reappearing after being picked at by animals), ultimately answers to himself.

Senécal and Grou present a post-Quiet Revolution Québécois 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

he 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 works 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-Quiet Revolution Quebec 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 elements, and can be understood as the eruption of the internal cultural forces described herein. The result is a caustic cinematic experience grounded in the corporeal 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.

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Chelsea Birks & Dana Keller

Extreme Vancouver

In the preface to this issue of *Cinephile*, Tanya Horeck 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 North America. VIFF carves out a unique place for itself through a particular focus on East Asian and Canadian cinemas, as well as its extensive nonfiction program. While VIFF offers a fantastic variety of films, its selection of horror and extremist cinema leaves something to be desired. It is clear from the festival's mandate and program that the programmers seek affective films, whether they impact the spectator on a physical or emotional level. Despite this desire for strong affective films, and in contrast with the programs of many other film festivals (for example, TIFF and Sundance), there are not a lot of horror or extremist films at VIFF.

We interviewed Curtis Woloschuk, VIFF programming assistant, to inquire about the lack of programming featuring horror and other film genres that commonly overlap with extremist 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 Salem* (Rob Zombie), for instance, have distributors attached, and this can sometimes include prohibitively high screen-

ing 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 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," are exceptions to the rule and generally draw audiences. He also noted that this year *Grabbers*, *Room 237*, *Berberian Sound Studio*, and *Antiviral* all did quite well. While horror and other forms of extreme cinema remain a minor part of the festival, Woloschuk is optimistic that that "a larger horror presence is a possibility," adding "it's certainly something that [he is] going to be pushing for."

The fact that films featuring extreme content did relatively well at the festival this year indicates that extremism has a place in Vancouver's cinema culture. Among these films were a nature documentary about fishermen, a Malaysian family drama, a feminist critique of Russian society, an homage to Italian giallo films exploring extremity through sound, and a Canadian debut feature by the son of body-horror master David Cronenberg.

Leviathan

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

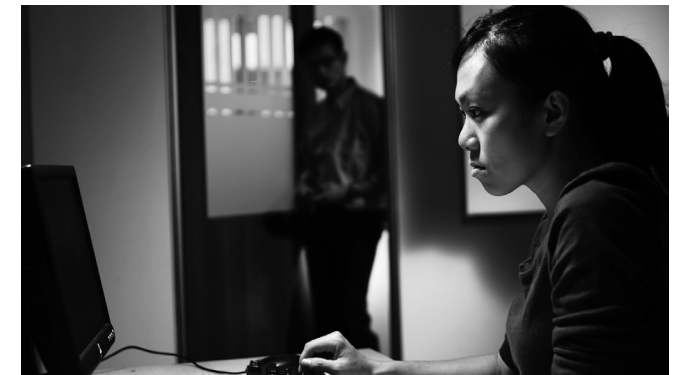


and contemptible, contradictions that evoke comparisons with the art house/grindhouse aesthetic of new extremist cinema (the nod to Claire Denis in the credits gives further credence to this comparison).

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 walked-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.

If It's Not Now, Then When?

Prolific Malaysian filmmaker James Lee is known both for his art house sensibility and for his graphic genre pictures, a tension that underlies his latest film, *If It's Not Now, Then When?* A family drama that explores estrangement and desperation with emotional restraint and a low-budget digital aesthetic, *If It's Not Now, Then When?* examines the broken relationships between a mother (Pearlly Chua), daughter (Tan Bee Hung), and son (Kenny Gan) after the passing of the father. The mother leaves money in places where she knows her son will steal it, the daughter attempts to find fulfillment in a hollow affair with her callous boss, and the



son disinterestedly engages in petty theft and emotionally abuses his girlfriend in order to pass the time. They never seem to occupy the same space, passing through the house like sullen ghosts and interacting only at a distance through misinterpreted messages and disconnected conversations. The film concludes with a burst of unprovoked violence and an act of incest, transgressions that suggest the costs and implications of social isolation.

The sexual act between brother and sister that concludes the film is both shocking and strangely gratifying: their lovemaking is the first truly intimate act in the film and it is shot in an extended take that treats their desire with tenderness. The film's final act throws the preceding events into new light, implying new reasons for the family's alienation and misery. The film's force as a work of so-called extreme cinema comes not from the two transgressive acts that conclude it, but from the long-simmering anguish that they represent. *If It's Not Now, Then When?* offers incest and violence as ineludible consequences of modern family life; the only other choice available is to continue asking the film's titular question.

Twilight Portrait

At first glance Marina (Olga Dykhovichnaya) 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 house cinema. The film's dispassion and ambiguity serve to alienate rather than eliciting affect, however, and in this the film has more in common with the clinical detachment of Michael Haneke or even the cool depravity of Cronenberg's *Crash* than with the visceral trauma of films like *Irreversible* or *Romance*. But *Twilight Portrait* lacks the unsettling subtlety of Haneke or the latent desperation of *Crash*, and its refusal to provide or acknowledge any meaning for itself is often frustrating. The film's impenetrability might be read as symptomatic of a particularly nihilistic view of contemporary Russia, a world where brutality and corruption are met with disinterested resignation. The most disturbing part of *Twilight Portrait*, though, is that it risks evoking the same apathetic response in the spectator.

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*, *Rammbock*, and *Young Girls 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 film's sound design transposes the viscera from the human body to our everyday surroundings. Throbbing with a life of their own, *Berberian's* sets take control of the narrative; the characters, stuck in the belly of the film with no way out, become increasingly hopeless until eventually they go mad.

Antiviral

The simultaneous contempt and coveting of celebrities in contemporary society forms the basis for Brandon 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 "meaty-ness" of the people depicted in the film. In one scene, for example, globs of goopy 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, 30 International premieres, 49 North American premieres and 40 Canadian premieres.

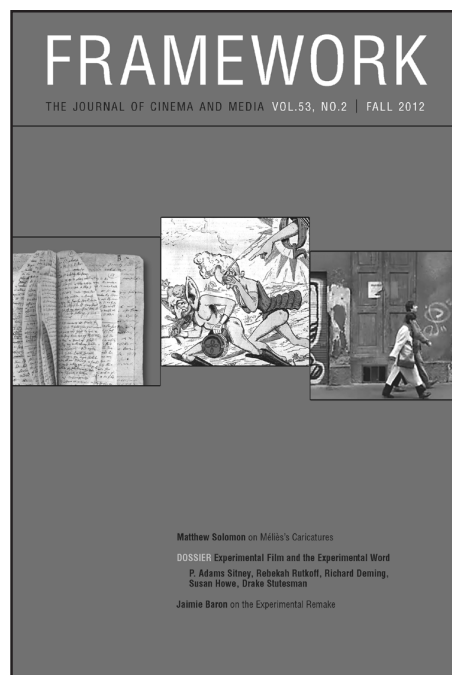
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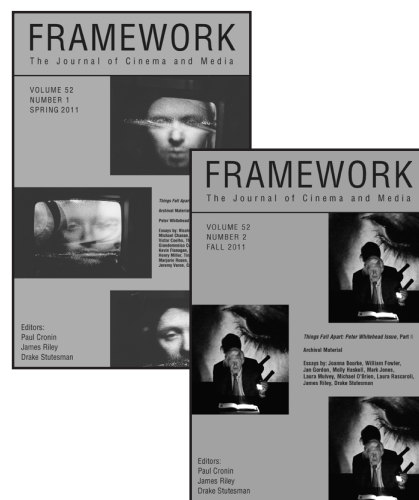


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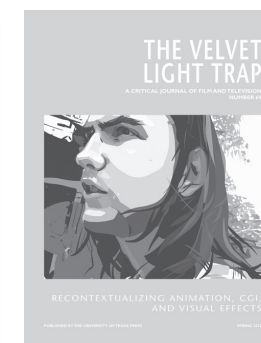
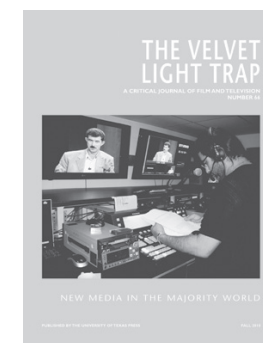
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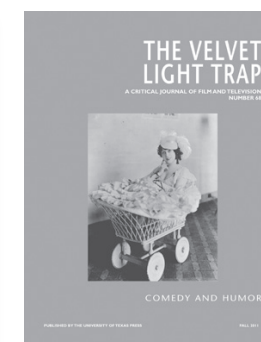
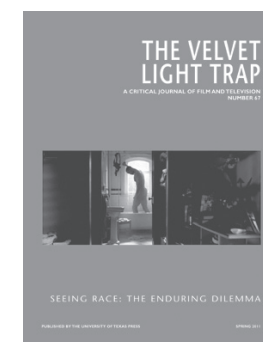
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