CONSUMING MUTILATION:

AFFECTIVITY AND CORPOREAL

TRANSGRESSION ON STAGE AND SCREEN

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DECLARATION

This thesis is my own work. It has not been submitted for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis suggests the possibility that psychoanalytic frameworks may prove insufficient to apprehend the workings of post-millennial horror. Through a sustained exploration of how affect theory may be applied to horror, I propose a new affective corporeal model that accounts for the impact of recent films such as *Saw* (James Wan, 2004) and *Hostel* (Eli Roth, 2005). I also explore how such a theoretical approach exceeds cognitivism in favour of an understanding of the genre founded on phenomenology, Pain Studies and Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the 'body without organs'. This thesis finds the seed for spectatorial affect in the dramatic tradition and its corporeal instantaneity. It thus also offers a brief genealogy of affective mutilation as it is evolves in Greek tragedy, Shakespearean drama, the Gothic stage, the theatre of the grand guignol and Artaud's theatre of cruelty. Case studies of representative texts shed light on the affective innovations that cinema draws from in order to convey similar participatory experiences.

I consider how contemporary horror appeals directly to the somatic body through a focus on moments of extreme mutilation. I therefore find it necessary to complicate traditional views of the genre as sadistic, and offer a more nuanced conceptualisation of visual mutilation that allows for fluid, organic and non-representational connections between on-screen bodies and spectators. Issues of cinematic identification and alignment are addressed in relation to key texts of the

'torture porn' and 'snuff films' subgenres. Ultimately, I show that the affective corporeal model may be used to analyse a number of texts which utilize and manipulate the organic aspects of human embodiment. Precisely because the chosen texts have not been traditionally studied under an affective lens before, the results render an innovative re-evaluation of their cultural and spectatorial dimensions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION: Corporeal Nightmares

'The only object of terror is the body'.[1]

At the beginning of Eli Roth's influential horror film *Hostel* (2005), a shy and good-hearted American named Josh (Derek Richardson) suddenly finds himself trapped within the walls of a sultry Amsterdam brothel. As he uncomfortably waits for his friends in a corridor that leads to various sex chambers, he hears loud screaming and assumes a prostitute is being beaten. Eager to help, he bursts into the room, but what he encounters far exceeds the already wild scenario played out in his mind. Rather than shouting for help, the woman in the room is fully clad in S/M gear and is offering a particularly loud customer a severe, but consensual, whipping. What is remarkable, however, is not the victim/punisher reversal, but rather that the dominatrix assumes Josh is spying on their sexual practices. Her automatic deadpan demand, 'you watch, you pay', is more largely indicative of the voyeurism inherent in the graphic displays of violence which have permeated the horror genre in the new century. It is not surprising that, after this sequence, *Hostel* proceeds to exploit the corporeal nightmares of torture chambers and their even more extreme and severe carnal treatments. It is my contention that, through horror's marked emphasis on carnality, the boundaries dividing spectatorial and fictional bodies blur. A film like *Hostel* seeks, at least partially, to explore the possibility of finding pleasure in the consumption of mutilation. In this thesis I explore how carnage can and does generate a form of somatic affect. If modern horror has often been preoccupied with replicating dismemberment, mutilation, bodily transformation or murder convincingly, post-

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[1] Jonathan Lee Crane, *Terror and Everyday Life: Singular Moments in the History of the Horror Film* (London and Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994), p. 9.

millennial horror cashes in on an even stronger affective connection between spectator and text.

In 1983, Philip Brophy coined the word 'horrality' to refer to the growth of special effects in horror cinema and their particular convergence with a form of cinematic realism used to depict the thorough destruction of the body.[2] Refusing the psychological in favour of the physiological, blockbusters like *The Hills Have Eyes* (Wes Craven, 1977) or *The Evil Dead* (Sam Raimi, 1981) were described as cinematic carnival rides that would 'tense your muscles, quicken your heart and jangle your nerves'.[3] Corporeality was seen to have taken over the genre, privileging the 'act of showing over the act of telling' and galvanising cinematic and physical transgressions.[4] However, if it is true that the slasher genre, which was at its peak at the time of Brophy's writing, did contribute to the gradual increase in levels of on-screen gore, one could argue that such has been the fare of horror since the first cinematic experiments of Georges Méliés. Before the endless slaying and sexual indulgence of the *Halloween* (John Carpenter, 1978) and *Friday the 13th* (Sean S. Cunningham, 1980) franchises, the films of Herschell Gordon Lewis had already caused a stir for the visual excesses they indulged in. Before him, the now celebrated Hammer Horrors brought gore into the age of Technicolor. Even the Frankenstein monster of the first Universal horror productions can be perceived as a major corporeal breakthrough in terms of the highly accomplished and realistic portrayal of its reanimated corpse. The story of horror is, to a certain extent, inextricable from both the constant overexposure of the body and the advances in techniques that may have rendered its injuring or dismemberment believable.

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[2] Philip Brophy, 'Horrality: The Textuality of Contemporary Horror Films', *Screen* 27, 1 (1986), 2-13 (p. 5). This article appeared originally in the spring issue of the Australian journal *Art and Text* in 1983.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid., p. 2.

But this assertion somewhat denies the fact that the term 'horrality' was also created, as Brophy himself acknowledged, to 'describe a specific historical juncture, a cultural phase that is as fixed as the semantic accuracy of words'.[5] Although Brophy did not go on to define the socio-cultural context for this assertion, discourses surrounding the contemporary body have a currency that resonates particularly strongly in the new millennium. They have, most importantly, found expression in sociological and cultural studies on the contemporary subject and its dependence on embodiment. Shaun Gallagher's cognitivist approach to the phenomenal aspects of consciousness, for example, recently defined the self as first and foremost 'an embodied self'.[6] The human body is now seen as 'structur[ing]' and 'shap[ing] the human experience of self, and perhaps the very possibility of developing a sense of self'.[7] This 'corporeal turn' has meant a thorough rejection of Cartesian models of thinking that rendered the body 'mere material handmaiden of an all-powerful mind, a necessary but ultimately discountable aspect of cognition, intelligence and even affectivity'.[8] Rather than universalise emotions, the acknowledgment of the material genesis of the act of feeling has shifted the focus towards the particularities of thinking through our flesh. Lisa Blackman writes of the 'somatically felt body' as a form of 'aliveness or vitality that is literally felt or sensed but cannot necessarily be articulated, reduced to physiological processes or to the effect of social structures'.[9] This foregrounding of the living and organic body is one that has had clear repercussions on how we understand life and the human subject. The somatic import of the flesh does not reduce us to meat, but it does bring with it a certain awareness of

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[5] Ibid., p. 3.
[6] Shaun Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind* (Oxford and New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 3.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, *The Corporeal Turn: An Interdisciplinary Reader* (Exeter and Charlottesville, VA: Imprint Academic, 2009), p. 2. The term 'corporeal turn' was coined by Sheets-Johnstone in 1990.
[9] Lisa Blackman, *The Body: The Key Concepts* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2008), p. 30.

the vulnerability and transience of the same subject that in previous centuries was seen to transcend the material.

Scientific and philosophical studies have probed the very incapacity for articulation that Blackman identifies as concomitant with the apprehending of the lived body. The acknowledgement that not everything we experience can be explained through logical reasoning has had an undeniable impact on how we view cognitive processes and their relation to our constitution as sentient subjects.[10] For example, it is now recognised that cognition is marked by psycho-motor processes that we cannot always control and which are prior to a psychological awareness of the fact. As Gallagher explains, there is scientific evidence that 'indicates that one's body anticipates one's conscious experience'.[11] This thesis thus takes this contemporary understanding of the body as somatically reactive to depart from and complement the widespread psychoanalytic model that has been preferred in the study of horror. Important critics like Robin Wood or Barbara Creed have developed useful theories on the bodily pleasures of horror, but these often neglect the body's more direct involvement in what I view as a primarily affective process. If, as Jesse J. Prinz asserts, 'emotions are gut reactions', the genre is in need of a theory that will account for the immediacy of its viscerality.[12] Affect, taken here as a notion separate from emotions, mood or subjective states, and therefore invested in raw intensity, becomes the driving force for an exploration of the corporeal dynamics of the experience of mutilation when used to generate fear. To go back to Brophy, if to speak of corporeality and horror is to speak of the subject and its historical contingencies, then

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[10] Even reason has been shown to be ultimately shaped by the body. See *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought*, ed. by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (New York: Basic Books, 1999), pp. 4, 16-7.

[11] Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind*, p. 237.

[12] Jesse J. Prinz, *Gut Reactions: A Perceptual Theory of Emotion* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. viii. Whilst I am not suggesting that all horror is visceral, I would suggest that affective corporeality, that is creating fear of the body through the body, plays an important role in the majority of its filmic examples.

a close study of post-millennial horror should reveal an ontological picture not unlike that exposed by Gallagher or Blackman. The body, and its inextricability from mind and thought, should have become the main character of the horror film.

But why horror as the basis for an exploration on affective corporeal transgression? Adriana Cavarero has recently reminded us that the term 'horror' comes from the Latin verb 'horreo', which refers to the 'hair-raising' quality (the bristling of gooseflesh) of that type of fear.[13] Horror is a genre that is particularly well-suited to accommodate the forms of somatic empathy that are part and parcel of affect in its visual workings. Although there is 'something of the frightful' in it, horror is still different from terror in that it champions a form of repugnance that keeps viewers '[g]ripped by revulsion in the face of a form of violence that appears more inadmissible than death', that keeps their bodies 'nailed to the spot, hairs standing on end'.[14] Horror, particularly in its post-millennial incarnations, appeals to the lived body by turning the visceral and the bloody into intense forms of interactive participation with moving images. As an unashamedly bodily genre that often revels in the creation of a direct corporeal rapport between text and spectator, horror becomes the prime locus for situating the playful transgression of the body in entertainment.[15] It is worth noting here that this study understands horror as always fictional. Although the somatic empathy that will be the focus of chapter one is not exclusive to film or drama, there is a set of visual and technical paradigms that come into play in the creation of fictional horror (framing, narrative emphasis, etc.) and which do not form a constitutive part of the experience of witnessing real mutilation. The concomitant cognitive processes, although similar in essence, are also necessarily

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[13] Adriana Cavarero, *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 7.
[14] Ibid., p. 8.
[15] See Linda Williams, 'Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess', *Film Quarterly*, 44 (1991), 2-13.

diametrically opposite, if only because the fictional horror experience is generally one intentionally sought by the viewer.

My thesis is therefore grounded in studies like Jack Morgan's *The Biology of Horror* (2002), which suggest that 'the horror literature tradition is an aspect of our mental life in which our physiological constitution is most notably implicit'.[16] According to such accounts, 'horror is essentially bio-horror and involves the tenuous negotiations between rationality and a looming biological plenum that defies rational mapping'.[17] By very specifically addressing the visceral side of horror as it affects the spectatorial body, I attempt to uncover the dynamics of fictional corporeal transgression. However, unlike critics like Morgan, I seek the seed for this affective drive in the performative tradition. Certain periods in drama, from Greek tragedy to the 'in-yer-face' theatre of Sarah Kane, have emphasised corporeality in all its transgressive glory, and have tried to connect very explicitly the experience of mutilation with that of audience perception. Because the ocular immediacy and the display of violence are more direct processes in drama and cinema than they are in literature, where the materialisation of violence is left to the imagination of the reader, I suggest that affective corporeal transgression can be best charted through both of them. Instead of arguing for the affective side of drama or cinema, I see both artistic forms as allowing for affect through the use of techniques that make mutilation realistic and convincing.

Morgan's understanding of horror as a genre that recuperates the 'organic life' in us as 'neglected' and 'marginalized' by the mainstream is also the genesis for the influential work of Jonathan Lee Crane on cinematic horror.[18] In *Terror and Everyday*

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[16] Jack Morgan, *The Biology of Horror: Gothic Literature and Film* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002), pp. 2-3.
[17] Ibid., p. 3.
[18] Ibid.

Life (1994), he notes the pleasure to be found in the experience of visceral enjoyment of the body while positing the obscuring limitations of the psychoanalytic modes of enquiry that have attempted to define it. His concern that an overemphasis in the connections between the unconscious and horror might occlude other forms of social comment (the status of the community, the role of technology, etc.), runs alongside an inquest into the nature of 'simple narratives that seem to exist solely to showcase the latest leap forward in stomach-churning special effects'.[19] My own reservations about psychoanalysis are further discussed in chapter one, but it is important to acknowledge at this point that the present study is driven by a similar preoccupation with critical models that have relied on metaphorical or representational readings of horror. This thesis, like Crane's book, wishes to consider the contentious idea that injuries sustained by the body on screen might be experientially transferrable to the viewer.[20] Crane, writing in 1994, considers the by-then receding slasher or 'stalker cycle'.[21] His work thus necessarily omits what has been perceived as an even bloodier period in horror history, namely the films that became popular during the 2000s.[22] Interestingly, a lot of the characteristics that Crane already ascribed to the 'new horror' of the late 1980s are also present in post-millennial horror: a bleak sense of nihilism, a further pull towards the human dimension of the genre, the use of special effects to create realistic evisceration and the lack of a clear resolution.[23] This study concretises some of Crane's vaguest ideas, that is, how film might actually hurt the potential viewer, or how we can theoretically justify that watching horror is connected to states of being that lie outside the social. I do so by considering horror in the new millennium and

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[19] Crane, *Terror and Everyday Life*, pp. 29, 2.
[20] Ibid., p. 2.
[21] See Vera Dika, *Games of Terror: Halloween, Friday the 13th, and the Films of the Stalker Cycle* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1990).
[22] J. A. Kerswell calls these films the 'new slashers' in *Teenage Wasteland: The Slasher Movie Uncut* (London: New Holland Publishers, 2010), p. 170.
[23] Crane, *Terror and Everyday Life*, pp. 8-10.

what I perceive as yet another step towards the genre's eminently corporeal inscription. In a sense, this work also challenges Crane's notion that blood and realistic detail work as markers of the horror experience at an aesthetic level. Instead, I contend that it is the capacity of certain horror films to present corporeal transgression as real (and not necessarily beautiful) that proves a basic requisite in the creation of what I theorise as the encounter with the 'body without organs'.[24] Mutilation is not necessarily attractive because it is aesthetically pleasing, although this is possible in a different contemplative context, but because it is capable of affecting the body of the spectator.

It is important, before the affective model of horror is developed, to lay down the basis for my refusal of the term 'postmodern horror' to refer to the genre in the new millennium, as well as for my positioning of postmillennial horror at the centre of corporeal entertainment. Whilst the 'postmodern' label may have been useful to refer to the hybrid, self-referential films of the *Scream* franchise (1996-2011), it is more difficult to see how it sheds any light on films like *Saw* (James Wan, 2004) or *Hostel*. This is not to deny the fact that a certain savvy self-awareness has pervaded the genre. In fact, post-millennial horror has been deeply influenced by the postmodern qualities identified by scholars in horror films of the 1980s and 1990s. As early as 1986, Tania Modleski notes the sustained thwarting of audience expectations with regards to closure.[25] In her study of the characteristics of postmodern horror, Pinedo observes that the genre is now governed by the danger of everyday life and an emphasis on extreme violence.[26] Andrew Tudor adds that it is also mainly a hybrid of other genres,

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[24] I borrow this notion from Deleuze and Guattari. See chapter one, section four.
[25] Tania Modleski, 'The Terror of Pleasure: The Contemporary Horror Film and Postmodern Theory', in *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 155-66 (p. 160).
[26] Isabel Cristina Pinedo, *Recreational Horror: Women and the Pleasures of Horror Film Watching* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), p. 17.

normally self-conscious comedy, and that it has a tendency to spawn sequels.[27] To a certain degree, these are all elements, qualities or visual concerns that are still part and parcel of many films produced in the last decade. However, the only feature of postmodern horror in relation to which all these scholars concur is in an increase in the gruesome dismemberment of on-screen bodies.[28] This thirst for gore demands that we consider post-millennial horror as a different cinematic breed. Whilst typically postmodern tricks such as the use of pastiche, hybridity or self-awareness may have recurred in some films, hyper-violence and its bleak treatment sets new horror apart from the more playful products of the 1990s. There are two additional differences between postmodern (or paranoid) horror and post-millennial horror. Firstly, post-millennial horror can no longer be conceived of as 'adversarial' in relation to its contemporary culture.[29] Films like *Saw* or *Hostel*, which form the basis of my discussion in chapter three, are marketed as gory products not for the faint-hearted, something which is reflected in their adult ratings and promotional campaigns. Yet these films have made it into the mainstream, with Hollywood budgets and notable tie-in campaigns that have rendered them profitable franchises. These new horror films may therefore, in a sense, be seen as 'adversarial' only in that they 'are engaged in an [...] assault on all that bourgeois culture is supposed to cherish – like the ideological apparatuses of the family and the school', since they have been assimilated by consumer culture. The second, and perhaps most important, difference is that the link between splatter and comedy that characterised films like *The Evil Dead*, *Braindead* (Peter Jackson, 1992), *Wes Craven's New Nightmare* (Wes Craven, 1994)

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[27] Andrew Tudor, 'From Paranoia to Postmodernism?: The Horror Movie in Late Modern Society', in *Genre and Contemporary Hollywood*, ed. by Stephen Neale (London: British Film Institute, 2002), pp. 105-16 (p. 109).

[28] Modleski, 'The Terror of Pleasure', p. 160; Pinedo, *Recreational Terror*, p. 19; Tudor, 'From Paranoia to Postmodernism', p. 109.

[29] Modleski, 'The Terror of Pleasure', p. 158.

or *Scream* (Wes Craven, 1996) has all but dissolved by the time *Saw*'s nihilistic message reaches box office success in 2004.[30] Whilst *Hostel* still allows its characters a few jokes, these light scenes are set in contradistinction to other gorier, scarier moments in the film. The broken bodies in these sequences do not mean to cause laughter. If, as Tudor proposes, the 1980s and the 1990s paved the way for a 'turn to "internality"' that focused on the 'ferocious and graphic destruction of victims' bodies', such violence is no longer articulated through comic relief.[31]

Post-Millennial Specifics: 'Bodily Horror' vs. Body Horror

Horror films in the noughties are still undergoing a process of categorization and cultural assimilation. This is partly a direct consequence of the fact that not enough time has elapsed since the turn of the millennium for scholars to be able to assess categorically the possible role of horror in the twenty-first century. The situation is also necessarily influenced by the continuing success of subgenres like torture porn, which is still hugely popular. Because such trends have not died out and might still produce landmark texts, it is difficult to offer definitive studies on them, even when these are presented as deliberately provisional. But despite the immediacy of the recent quality of this cinematic past, horror films since 2000 have generated a great deal of criticism from a field that has attempted to historicise and make a claim for their cultural allegiance to the Zeitgeist. In fact, a number of scholars have used 9/11 as the backdrop for readings of horror which articulate almost exclusively anxieties

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[30] Tudor, 'From Paranoia to Postmodernism?', p. 107. An exception is Sam Raimi's own *Drag Me to Hell* (2009).

[31] Ibid., p. 109. This is not to say that these films do not contain moments of comic relief, but merely that these do not normally coincide with the sequence of heavy corporeal transgression.

about terrorism.[32] I will be arguing throughout this thesis that, although this critical strand is important, as is psychoanalysis, there is a pressing need to acknowledge the more direct corporeal impact of horror championed by Brophy, Crane and Morgan. This implies a move away from the body politic and a step forward towards the more carnal body of the spectator. I will thus define a complementary affective approach to corporeal transgression that, whilst still grounding the subject in his/her context, acknowledges the sensorial dimension of the viewing experience.

As I have already noted, the very few critics who have centred their studies on the visceral quality of horror generally predate the timeframe for this study. But when the gory or bloody nature of the genre in its contemporary guise has generated any comments at all, as is the case with films like *Turistas*, aka *Paradise Lost* (John Stockwell, 2006) or *The Ruins* (Carter Smith, 2008), the label used has inevitably been 'body horror'.[33] This category has been described by Paul Wells as 'the explicit display of the decay, dissolution and destruction of the body, foregrounding bodily processes and functions under threat, allied to new physiological configurations and redefinitions of anatomical forms'.[34] Whilst films like *Saw* and *Hostel* turn corporeal transgression into a form of spectacle and necessarily redefine corporeality by dismembering it, the reality is that they have little in common with body horror classics like *The Thing* (John Carpenter, 1982) or the seminal work of Canadian director David Cronenberg. The types of scenarios newer films propose are not imbued in the transformation and mutation of the body, or in the processes of contagion and subsequent dermatologic or carnal metamorphosis. A film like *Cabin*

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[32] See Reynold Humphries, 'A (Post)modern House of Pain: *FeardotCom* and the Prehistory of the Post/9-11 Torture Film', in *American Horror Film: The Genre at the Turn of the Millennium*, ed. by Steffen Hantke (Jackson, MI: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), pp. 58-74.

[33] See, for example, Kevin J. Wetmore, *Post-9/11 Horror in American Cinema* (London and New York: Continuum, 2012), p. 99.

[34] Paul Wells, *The Horror Genre: From Beelzebub to Blair Witch* (London and New York: Wallflower, 2000), p. 114.

Fever (Eli Roth, 2002), which very specifically tracks the development of a flesh-eating virus on a number of American students on holiday, is testimony to this fact. Whilst it is undeniably an influential horror film that helped launch the career of its director, it is never included in discussions of torture porn. This is because the threat in this film is not anthropomorphised. The virus causes the gradual yet accelerated decay of the bodies of the youngsters, thus inflicting pain and agony and facilitating inclusion of a number of gory scenes. This 'body horror' is very different in essence to the 'bodily horror' that is the subject of this study.

Both body and bodily horror can be productively seen as cinematic reminders of the need to acknowledge the somatic side of fear. As Linda Badley has explained, body horror needs to be seen as 'one of several discourses of the body that use the fantastic – the iconography of the monstrous – to articulate the anxieties of the 1980s and to re-project the self'.[35] The case of Clive Barker is important here. His corporeal horror was perceived as intrinsically different from the modes of horror that had come previously.[36] William Gibson famously saw Barker's fiction as starting a 'post-King era' in the genre, and Douglas E. Winter even coined a new term, 'anti-horror', to describe Barker's work.[37] His investment in the visceral and the transformative capacity of the flesh, is crucial to the development of horror history, particularly after the success of *Hellraiser* (Clive Barker, 1987). His is, together with the work of Cronenberg, a study of 'the condition of being flesh and blood'.[38] Cronenberg's *The Fly* (1986), for example, investigates the boundaries, mental and physiological, between animal and human, as well as the possible detrimental scenario that would

[35] Linda Badley, *Writing Horror and the Body: The Fiction of Stephen King, Clive Barker, and Anne Rice* (London and Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996), p. xiii.
[36] Contemporary horror critic Noël Carroll described Barker's writing as including 'depictions of gore that go far beyond what one finds in the tradition'. See *The Philosophy of Horror: or Paradoxes of the Heart* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 211.
[37] William Gibson and Douglas E. Winter, both quoted in Badley, *Writing Horror and the Body*, p. 73.
[38] Clive Barker, quoted in Badley, *Writing Horror and the Body*, p. 7.

occur upon their collapse. *Videodrome* (David Cronenberg, 1983) explores similar territory with relation to technology and the limits of the body, in a fashion not dissimilar to that proposed by *Hellraiser*'s inferno of endless flaying. These fantastic universes are often shot through a Biblical lens in the case of Barker, whose fictional constellations in later work go as far as to establish an alternative flesh pantheon in the narrative toy line *Tortured Souls: Animae Damnatae* (McFarlane Toys, 2001) or the video-game *Jericho* (CodeMasters, 2007).

Linda Williams once described body horror as 'obsessed with limits – with the skin as a boundary, with the tolerance of audience expectation and desire, and with the connection between the two, as on-screen visceral violation provokes visceral response'.[39] The corporeal nightmares of body horror thus have a similar origin to those of contemporary horror, that is, they seek to create fear around the notion of the body. However, their stimulus and impact are decidedly different from those of bodily horror. Clive Barker, for example, still believes that visceral horror might offer a way to track the changing process bodies undergo as a consequence of time (aging), sex (gender reassignment) or aesthetic choice ('bod mod'), but the soul figures largely as the backdrop for all these becomings. Body horror is thus an exploration, not of the nihilistic conception of the body as the limit of existence, but of the innovative possibilities to be found in its explosion.[40] This is something that, for Barker, is rooted in the 'fiction of the fantastic', which is 'brim[ming] with metaphors' and offers a starting point, rather than an endpoint.[41] As Michael Morrison has put it, body horror

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[39] Linda Williams, 'The Inside-Out of Masculinity: David Cronenberg's Visceral Pleasures', in *The Body's Perilous Pleasures: Dangerous Desires in Contemporary Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp. 30-48 (p. 34).

[40] Jay McRoy writes of 'Barker's posthuman creations' as 'advanc[ing] an oppositional politics' that 'reveal[s] an alternative economy of identity predicated upon a thematics of multiplicity, hybridity, and alterity'. See his 'There Are No Limits: Splatterpunk, Clive Barker, and the Body *in-extremis*', *Paradoxa*, 17 (2002), 130-50 (pp. 130, 147).

[41] Clive Barker, 'V for Vice Versa', in *Clive Barker's A-Z of Horror*, ed. by Stephen Jones (London: BBC Books, 1997), pp. 197-206, p. 189.

is a fiction that champions the 'journey to "a new kind of life", with death or reconfiguration of the body as a common rite of passage [which] ends in post-human states of being that are clearly preferable to the desolate banality of twentieth-century middle-class society'.[42] The emphasis of this writing on supernatural elements and its celebration of the transmorphic capacities of the body are set in opposition to that of contemporary horror, which often depicts the body as a carnal prison. The fact that body horror often relies on the fantastic elements or situations that stretch the viewer's suspension of disbelief also affects the possibility for vicarious involvement. As Brophy notes in his discussion of horrality, the 'most physically effective scene' in a film like *The Thing* is not the discovery of the beast and its monstrous body, but rather the extreme close-up of a thumb being slit for a blood sample. As he explains, '[t]he audience might gasp and scream in the other scene, but in this scene, one's body is queasily affected not by fear or horror, but by the precision the photographic image is able to exact upon us'.[43] This primacy of the carnally intelligible is largely developed in the first chapter of this thesis, which finds a working model through which to understand cinematic somatic empathy. Whilst I am not suggesting that transmutation and the horrors of the flesh proposed by body horror are not susceptible to following this model, post-millennial corporeal nightmares have very specifically rejected the spiritual and centred on the carnage of the body as caused by the external influence of other individuals. As a result, the treatment of mutilation is very different in tone and, as I will show, in execution.

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[42] Michael Morrison, quoted in *Clive Barker's A-Z of Horror*, pp. 205-6.
[43] Brophy, 'Horrality', p. 11. Brophy provides another good illustration through *The Evil Dead*. He argues that the grotesque spectacle of monstrous bodies is somewhat belittled by the affective capacity of a simple pencil being driven into a 'real' ankle (p. 12).

Jason Colavito, writing about the characteristics of the extreme horror films of the new millennium, proposes that they are driven by a sense of 'helplessness'.[44] It could be argued that this rendering of the characters as powerless is already there in body horror, as the characters in films like *Shivers* (David Cronenberg, 1975), *Rabid* (David Cronenberg, 1977) and *Videodrome* have little control over their situations. In fact, most of the time the inevitable denouements include death, suicide or the contraction of a mind-altering virus. But Colavito is quick to add that this brand of horror 'focuse[s] its gaze on the sufferings of the victims rather than the predations of the monster', giving prevalence to the 'display [of] the physical and mental torturing of the innocent victims, in as drawn-out a way as possible'.[45] He also ventures the possibility that this new horror might have started to crystallise into a subgenre of its own, but that it could equally be an extension or culmination of the body horror present in previous decades where the audience is not meant 'to enjoy the sickening torture inflicted on the helpless victim'.[46] This thesis proposes that this new horror purposefully sets itself aside from previous cinematic traditions by very specifically eschewing the supernatural and grounding the horrific experience in the empirical and organic body. In this corporeal breed, the formula for killing prevails and may in some cases become, as Brigid Cherry has pointed out, the 'sole raison d'être of the films'.[47] Its preoccupations thus set bodily horror apart at both surface and narrative levels. The stalk and slash formula is substituted by one where torture, particularly the process of mutilation and the potential vicariousness of bodily pain, punctuate the pace and visual techniques in use. However, and contrary to the majority of film critics, I argue that such a change is not necessarily detrimental or linked to a depraved contemporary

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[44] Jason Colavito, *Knowing Fear: Science, Knowledge and the Development of the Horror Genre* (London and Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008), p. 349.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Colavito, *Knowing Fear*, pp. 350, 391.
[47] Brigid Cherry, *Horror* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 204.

sensitivity, but rather a necessary consequence of technical advances in cinema that mirror popular perceptions of life and death through affective corporeal transgression.

The drive to apprehend the more direct and pre-reflective side of spectatorship has also taken film scholars to develop affect theory theory alongside phenomenology. Laura U. Marks and her influential *The Skin of the Film* (2000) have introduced the concept of haptic visuality, which emphasises the importance of touch and the capacity for images to move us through synaesthesia beyond the more traditional mind-eye binary.[48] Theories like Marks', much like this thesis, seek to challenge models of cinema that favour the visual or representational and neglect the spectatorial body. Phenomenology gives prevalence to the lived body, that is, the experience of life as we feel it through our senses. Its methodological framework thus works well as a means to examine corporeal affect. Jennifer Barker, through a similar phenomenologic-affective approach, has considered the different aspects of the body that affect interacts with: 'the activities and responses of the external body – goose bumps, shivers, hands gripping the arms of one's seat', but also 'the internal body, where the pulse and the rhythmic filling of the lungs can enact and express feelings and emotions such as desire, fear, anticipation, and relief'.[49] This thesis, in developing a new affective model that accounts for the somatic and visceral processes through which film affects spectators, addresses the relations between external fictional bodies and internal human bodies.

Affective Corporeal Transgression: A Dramatic Anchoring

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[48] Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses* (London and Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), pp. 162-4.
[49] Jennifer M. Barker, *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), p. 120.

Although the notion of affect through corporeal transgression is developed fully in chapter one, it is worth noting here that I consider this term not as a feeling, complex emotive state or conscious response. Even though I sometimes refer to the sensation or emotions connected to fear, my focus lies purely on a visceral and somatic understanding of affect. That is, the word 'affect' is used to designate a 'physical disturbance and bodily activity' and not, as Margaret Wetherell explains, the 'more general modes of influence, movement and change' it sometimes refers to in the social sciences.[50] In a sense, affect is being invoked here as it has been theorised in recent work in the field of Cultural Studies: as a series of visceral intensities or forces that travel between bodies.[51] Even more specifically, the grounding for this nomenclature lies in the use of affect by Film scholars to designate the areas of contact between representation or narrative and the film's sensory-affective moments. Not surprisingly, these theorists have used Performance Studies as the springboard for their discussions of the materiality of film and its mimetic quality.[52] Both dramatic and filmic mediums, as systems of expression, rely on the body and its exploitation for the generation of direct affect on viewers. Both have also been in desperate need of a serious critical rethinking that will acknowledge their nature as intensive, as opposed to symbolic, corporeal experiences. Whilst there are significant differences between film and drama as sources of affect – namely cinema can afford the luxury of rerecording a

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[50] Margaret Wetherell, *Affect and Emotion: A New Social Science Understanding* (London and Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012), p. 2. This is to say, more generally, that I am not conflating the terms 'affect' and 'emotion', although affective images may cause more complex processes we might want to refer to as emotions.

[51] See Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, 'An Inventory of Shimmers', in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. by Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg (London and Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 1-25 (p. 1).

[52] The most notable of these is Anne Rutherford, who understands cinematic affect as 'the performative moment of the cinematic encounter' in her *What Makes a Film Tick?: Cinematic Affect, Materiality and Mimetic Enervation* (Oxford and New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2011), p. 39. Like Rick Altman, she draws her ideas on the affective experience of cinema from Peter Brooks' work on melodrama, which asks for a counter-narrative and representational approach to the study of drama. See Peter Brooks, 'Melodrama, Body, Revolution', in *Melodrama: Stage – Picture – Screen*, ed. by Jacky Bratton, Jim Cook and Christine Gledhill (London: BFI, 1994), pp. 11-24.

scene, for example, or of using close-ups and zoom-ins – the act of its consumption is achieved by similar means and in similar spaces. These circumstances need to be addressed by a theory that will allow for the nature of drama and film as ineluctably embodied events.

Elena del Río, who has recently applied Deleuzian affect theory to the performative in Film Studies, has explained the dramatic anchoring of such a methodology. Her rationale is that the act of performing sets in motion a series of 'incorporeal forces or affects', which become 'concrete expression-events that attest to the body's power of action and transformation'.[53] Performance necessarily derives its cognitive and somatic impact from recognisable experiences of the lived body and attempts to create changes to the body of the spectator precisely through the affective transformations of the bodies on stage. According to this dramatic model, which this thesis subscribes to, affect is 'the force of becoming that enables characters/actors, and ultimately the film, to pass from one bodily state to another' and performance is the expression of this process.[54] Because 'performance involves the expression and perception of affect on the body', cinematic affect is premised on the corporeal and sensorial exchanges inherited from drama.[55] The connection between spectator and performance, or rather between the body of the viewer and that of the performer, entails a complex process of affective contagion that, at its most theoretical, relies on the way the acts of other bodies have a direct effect on our lived body experience. Their framing as fictional and bound forms of affective corporeal exchange sets them apart from real life.

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[53] Elena del Río, *Deleuze and the Cinemas of Performance: Powers of Affection* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), pp. 3-4.
[54] Ibid., p. 10.
[55] Ibid.

As we can see, there is an obvious link between lived body experience and performance, between the act of embodiment required from the actor and the type of lived body experiences generated in spectators. But drama also presents, more specifically, the seed for a theory of spectatorial affect through mutilation. The theatre stage is an important arena where corporeal transgression may be enacted for a public. If its social function has inevitably varied greatly from Greek tragedy, I situate the form of cinematic affect studied in this thesis in the dramatic tradition. This is not merely based on obvious connections between cinema and drama, such as the use of communal spaces or similar duration of the final product, but on the corporeal instantaneity of both. Literary affect may have similar consequences to the extreme forms of filmic affect considered in chapter three – and the fainting spells at public readings of Chuck Palahniuk's work are testimony to this. Affect also may work somatically at a similar level, for example by creating a very visceral experience, but it ultimately relies on the very conscious process of imagination. Drama is taken as a key affective anchoring because the physical reality of the theatrical performance is akin to that of film viewing.[56] Whilst narrative techniques and devices are necessarily different, I read the affective stages considered in this thesis as having a similar corporeal investment in the experience of transgression.

The first chapter thus opens with an account of the limitations of the theoretical approaches used to describe the viscerality of contemporary horror and assesses the need for a model that foregrounds the affective aspects of these films. I start by delineating the important elements in psychoanalytic enquiries, particularly Barbara Creed's influential take on Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection. I then consider cognitivism and its promise of a more direct analysis of the moment of horror

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[56] For discussions on the formalistic connections between cinema and theatre, see Kamilla Elliott, *Rethinking the Novel/Film Debate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 113-32.

through thought theory. Such preoccupations with the nature of consciousness necessarily drive me to consider the more embodied phenomenological project, which I concretise through the body theory of Steven Shaviro, and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's understanding of affect. I propose that the moment of visceral encounter with the mutilated image may be understood through Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the Body without Organs, as viewers are returned to the viscerally lived body excluded by the social. In attempting to concretise the moment of vicarious pain elicited by exposure to corporeal transgression, the chapter then turns to Bataille to read the cinematic experience as one of ritual. Finally, since I emphasise the idea that the workings of affect are similar to the somatic reactions caused by pain, the chapter considers how Pain Studies may illuminate the idea of vicarious feeling by focusing on Drew Leder's absent body, or the biological body rediscovered through injury.

Because the main thrust of this thesis relies on a physiological approach, or as Linda Badley has put it, one that understands horror 'as one of several discourses of the body', I do not assume the genesis of its affective transgressive corporeality to be the exclusive province of the literary.[57] Whilst the work of Gothic prose writers may have helped shape the aesthetic of the Universal Studios films and Hammer productions, the corporeality of recent horror is one that does away with monsters and centres on the body. The second chapter anchors this affective corporeal transgression in the dramatic tradition of extreme or bodily drama. Starting with the cathartic model of Greek tragedy, particularly Euripides' *Bacchae* (405 BC), and following it through the bloody early modern stage via Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* (1588-93), I argue that the creation of spectatorial impact can be better grounded in the participatory relation established between body and stage, or theatre-goer and transgressed

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[57] Linda Badley, *Film, Horror and the Body Fantastic* (London and Westport: Greenwood Press, 1995), p. 3.

performative body. The chapter then considers the relevance of the Gothic stage, particularly through a sustained exploration of the profusion of special effects, the creation of shocking controversy in the work of Matthew Lewis and the corporeal basis for Joanna Baillie's anatomic theatre of the passions. The last two sections seek an extreme form of theatre, the closest perhaps to bodily horror, in the excessive and gory French grand guignol tradition and the affective experiments of Antonin Artaud. This section concludes by suggesting that, particularly in the work of Artaud, one can already sketch the beginnings of what would, in essence, drive the affective thrust away from the stage and into the realm of the cinematic. The prevalence of the image and its capacity to generate pre-arranged moments of realistic horror would make it the perfect medium for the exploitation of vicarious corporeal transgression.

However, whilst the affective and excessive theatre proposed by Artaud gained recognition, the corporeal nightmares of horror have rarely met with critical enthusiasm. In fact, one of the cases at hand, that of torture porn, has been greatly reviled by journalists and film critics. This rejection is partly a consequence of what has been perceived as horror's gratuitous use of violence and the bleak nihilism of its contemporary incarnations. Even Colavito, one of the few chroniclers of horror to take torture porn seriously, describes films like *Saw* and *Hostel* as little more than 'torture for profit, simulated snuff films'.[58] This pejorative rhetoric, which is also technically inaccurate, is the one challenged most directly by this thesis. Firstly, I take issue with the fact that successfully simulated mutilation should not be culturally recognised and argue that the somatic channels that corporeal transgression appeals to actually compose the basis of the horror experience. I organise this theoretical shift through an initial deconstruction of the sadist model proposed in the study of cinematic horror via

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[58] Colavito, *Knowing Fear*, p. 389.

a film that caused special controversy, Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* (1960). I then move on to show that allegedly simple films like *Saw* are very skilled in their use and treatment of violence, and that gore is not always the only driving force behind their often complex narratives. Chapter three thus explores the spectorial dynamics established by these films through a study of cinematic positioning and a re-evaluation of the pornographic qualities of their images. I thus offer an alternative model that understands the scopophilic interest in filmic mutilation as inextricable from affect, but also as influenced by a more general strand of anatomic fascination with the dissection of bodies that has permeated the mainstream.

I nevertheless take up Colavito's suggestion that simulated snuff might be part and parcel of contemporary horror, and thus devote a section of chapter three to investigating both faux snuff and films about snuff. I take these two similar, although aesthetically different, horror subgenres as examples of the limits at which corporeal transgression might be seen to be operating. Critics like Julian Petley have argued that discussions of the snuff film must inevitably circle around what constitutes fiction and what reality as well as their mediatic and public perceptions.[59] A detailed analysis of how the most extreme experience, death by murder, is cinematically constructed to appear 'true' will necessarily shed some light on the drive and consumption of this form of extreme corporeal affect. The blurring of simulated and real mutilation has made the films in the faux snuff series *August Underground* (Fred Vogel, 2001-2007) virtually unavailable in the UK and has led, in the case of Christopher Berthould, to a fine of £600 for possession one of the films in the *Guinea Pig/Ginī Piggu* series (1985-1988).[60] Such filmic examples beg consideration of the capacity of film to feign

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[59] Julian Petley, '"Snuffed Out": Nightmare in a Trading Standards Officer's Brain', in *Unruly Pleasures: The Cult Film and Its Critics* (Guilford: FAB Press, 2000), pp. 205-19 (p. 217).
[60] Jay McRoy, 'Simulating Torture, Documenting Horror: The Technology of "Non-Fiction Filmmaking" in *Devil's Experiment* and *Flowers of Flesh and Blood*', in *Horror Film: Creating and*

corporeal transgression so faithfully that the introduction of moral codes becomes necessary to police their potential effect on individuals. The final section of this thesis turns to the reflexivity of films like *Snuff-Movie* (Bernard Rose, 2005), which has led to the genre's exploitation of its own mediatic impact. I read the ethical implication of the viewers themselves as the culmination of horror's manipulation of the affective potential of corporeal trangression. By considering our own involvement with such material, this thesis reintegrates the subject into the viewing experience and situates both the thinking/physiological spectatorial body and the filmic body in a zone of empathic interconnection.

Marketing Fear, ed. by Steffen Hantke (Jackson, MI: University of Mississippi Press, 2004), pp. 135-49 (p. 139).

CHAPTER 1. Theoretical Implications: Towards an Affective Model of Horror

Section 1. Psychoanalytic and Cognitive Approaches to Horror

Psychoanalytic theory has inflected the study of horror film since it became a legitimate object of academic inquiry. From Robin Wood's seminal ideas on the return of the repressed in American cinema of the 1970s through to the recent reissue of Charles Derry's psychological history of modern horror in 2009, it would seem that psychoanalytic investigations have, in their various Freudian, Lacanian and Žižekian guises, become the 'most common accounts of the appeal of horror'.[1] The seminal films of David Cronenberg, for example, are now often read as visual literalisations of concepts such as the Oedipal complex or narcissism.[2] There is no denying that psychoanalytic approaches have been beneficial to the genre. If nothing else, Žižek's writings on Alfred Hitchcock show that there is indeed a most productive manner in which psychoanalysis can shed light on the subtexts or hidden messages in films like *Psycho* (1960) or *The Birds* (1963) and vice versa.[3] In fact, as Steven Jay Schneider notes, psychoanalytic readings may even prove to be better translations or rewritings of such messages.[4] The problem lies often not in the validity of these critical endeavours per se, but in their selection of primary materials that seem particularly susceptible to psychoanalytic readings. Most worryingly, the predilection for a type of

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[1] Robin Wood, 'The Return of the Repressed', *Film Comment*, 14 (1978), 25-32; Charles Derry, *Dark Dreams 2.0: A Psychological History of the Modern Horror Film from the 1950s to the 21st Century* (London and Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2009); Andrew Tudor, 'Why Horror?: The Peculiar Pleasures of a Popular Genre', *Cultural Studies*, 11 (1997), 443-463 (p. 446).

[2] Michael Grant, *Dead Ringers* (Trowbridge: Flicks Books, 1997).

[3] Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (London and Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1992); Slavoj Žižek, 'In His Bold Gaze My Ruin Is Writ Large', in *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Lacan But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock*, ed. by Slavoj Žižek (London and New York, NY: Verso, 2010), pp. 211-72.

[4] Steven Jay Schneider, 'Introduction: 'Psychoanalysis in/and/of the Horror Film', in *Horror Film and Psychoanalysis: Freud's Worst Nightmare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 1-14, pp. 11, 13.

horror that works at an unconscious level has developed into a deeply ingrained refusal to acknowledge body horror (particularly the slasher) as anything other than a 'perversion of the genre'.[5]

In this thesis I adopt an alternative theoretical approach based on affect and corporeal transgression, one that accounts for the popularity of blockbusters like *Saw* or *Hostel*, and, more generally, post-millennial horror's challenge to make the viewer 'experience fear'.[6] Whilst I am not suggesting that the theoretical implications of such a critical apparatus may act as another totalising master discourse, they do help to shed some light on the neglected immediacy and impact of the genre. Following the wake of recent 'organic' and corporeal considerations of horror like those of Steven Shaviro, Matt Hills and Julian Hanich, and building on previous work on its viscerality, this chapter works to furnish an understanding of the biological and socio-cultural significance of post-millennial horror through affect theory.[7] I focus here specifically on the torture porn phenomenon, partly because it has been the most successful subgenre of the last decade, but also because it makes the most obvious exploitative use of the on-screen body. This continued interest in mutilation and suffering sets the genre's most recent incarnation apart from its predecessors, and establishes a need for new theoretical tools that encompass the type of spectatorial experiences it proposes. As I have noted, the corporeal nightmares propounded by torture porn exceed the supernatural 'body horror' of previous decades, and their emphasis on torture, as opposed to the relatively diligent killings of the slasher

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[5] Robin Wood, 'Foreword: What Lies Beneath', *Horror Film and Psychoanalysis*, ed. by Steven Jay Schneider (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. xiii-xviii (p. xviii).

[6] 'Experience fear' was the tagline for the promotional poster of *REC* (Jaume Balagueró and Paco Plaza, 2007), one of the most successful Spanish horror films in history and which was remade with great success in America.

[7] Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body* (London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Matt Hills, *The Pleasures of Horror* (London and New York: Continuum, 2005); Julian Hanich, *Cinematic Emotion in Horror Films and Thrillers: The Aesthetic Paradox of Pleasurable Fear* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010).

subgenre, point towards the need to contextualise and explore the intricacies of a more direct and affective process of film consumption. By considering how previous psychoanalytic approaches (Creed's application of abjection) and cognitive interventions (Carroll's cognitivism) inevitably lead to a proto-affective theory, I investigate how the ideas of Shaviro, Deleuze and Massumi may provide an alternative critical idiom through which to understand the workings of post-millennial horror.

The Limitations of the Psychoanalytic Model

Affective readings do not necessarily entail a wholesale repudiation of psychoanalytic methods of analysis. To a certain extent, they are the logical step forwards in the study of horror, as they aim to investigate the areas of the cinematic experience neglected by that discipline. One of the most influential writers on the genre and its possible pleasures, Carol J. Clover, grounds her ideas precisely on a redefinition of the work of Laura Mulvey, who, together with Christian Metz, helped institutionalise the use of psychoanalysis in Film Theory. Using the work of LaPlanche, amongst others, she argues that what lies at the heart of films such as *Peeping Tom* is an essentially masochistic desire nurtured in the projection of the self onto the body of the suffering victim.[8] Her position challenges other more traditional readings of the film's focus on the implications of the recording and watching of death as a sadistic drive to consume violence for pleasure.[9] In this respect, Clover sees the sadomasochistic interplay as one that involves director and spectator, and not male consumer and female body, as

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[8] Carol J. Clover, *Men, Women and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 174.
[9] See, for example, David Pirie, *A New Heritage of Horror: The English Gothic Cinema* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009), p. 119.

Mulvey had proposed.[10] Horror thus becomes a genre invested in masochism, with sadism playing but a smaller, secondary role.[11] As we can see, whilst a psychoanalytic approach is not totally denied, its relational or structural components are redefined and a theory that will complement it is provided. This is also the case with another relevant element of psychoanalytic discourse, one that has been connected to the collapse of bodily boundaries and the creation of the disgust inherent to defilement: namely, abjection.

Barbara Creed, in her seminal article 'Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine' (1986), articulates the beginning of a proto-theory for the workings of affect in horror film.[12] Creed compares the experience of watching horror to the metaphoric castration of the male upon witnessing the presence of difference in female genitalia, analysing both processes of viewing as 'caus[ing] similar alterations in the body of the male spectator'.[13] Her overarching thesis, namely the claim that this change might be more generally applied to a non-gender-specific audience, is further elaborated in her study of 'the relationship between physical states, bodily wastes (even if metaphoric ones) and the horrific', observations all developed from Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection.[14] Creed offers a very convincing argument for its application to the field of Horror Studies; her insights might also be refined for the aesthetic-affective theory being traced in this article. In her foregrounding of the horror film as both a

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[10] Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen* 16 (1975), 6-18. According to her, traditional narrative film re-enacts social gender structures premised upon 'scopophilic instinct' and 'ego libido' (p. 17). Through representation, which is dominated by patriarchal ideology, the image of woman becomes '(passive) raw material for the (active) gaze of man' (ibid.). This is what leads Mulvey to suggest that 'cinema builds the way [woman] is to be looked at into the spectacle itself' (ibid.)

[11] This idea is further explored in chapter three, section one.

[12] Barbara Creed, 'Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection', *Screen*, 27 (1986), 44-70.

[13] Ibid., p. 44.

[14] Ibid., p. 45; Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982). Kristeva defines abjection as a 'dark revolt[...] of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable' (p. 1). When abjection is triggered in an individual, generally by impure or liminal substances or bodies, this threatens to break down the congenital boundaries that hold the social subject together.

metaphoric and literal work of abjection, Creed provides an interesting interpretation of the experience of horror as both a pleasure in the consumption of sickening images and the process of their expulsion outside the body.[15] Horror would, then, seem to become inscribed in the body in its rejection of horrific images/abjected substances, but Creed quickly situates this reading of horror within a psychoanalytic framework where the substances that provoke the moment of disgust

> [s]ignify a split between two orders: the maternal authority and the law of the father. On the one hand, these images of bodily wastes threaten a subject that is already constituted, in relation to the symbolic, as 'whole and proper'. Consequently, they fill the subject – both the protagonist in the text and the spectator in the cinema – with disgust and loathing. On the other hand, they also point to a time when a 'fusion between mother and nature' existed; when bodily wastes, while set apart from the body, were not seen as objects of embarrassment or shame. Their presence in the horror film may invoke a response of disgust from the audience situated as it is within the symbolic but at a more archaic level the representation of bodily wastes may invoke pleasure in breaking the taboo on filth – sometimes described as a pleasure in perversity – and a pleasure in returning to that time when the mother-child relationship was marked by an untrammelled pleasure in 'playing' with the body and its wastes. The modern horror film often 'plays' with its audience, saturating it with scenes of blood and gore, deliberately pointing to the fragility of the symbolic order in the domain of the body which never ceases to signal the repressed world of the mother.[16]

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[15] Creed, 'Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine', p. 48.
[16] Ibid., p. 52.

Here, the limitations of psychoanalytic readings of the experience of horror seem evident. If the usefulness of conjuring up an image of the abject that threatens subjective integrity is obvious, its reduction to the Oedipal tripartite that Deleuze and Guattari have called the 'mommy-daddy-me' schemata implies a degree of abstraction ultimately antagonistic to the impulsive nature of shock or disgust. The layer of additional maternal/abjected signification that Creed seems to identify at a primordial level could only be understood as instinctive or corporeal if related to the unconscious (or the Lacanian real), not the symbolic. Instead, Creed explains that the process of watching horror is based on a moment of attack on the symbolic body which is coupled with a certain regression to a prelapsarian state of substance and unity with the mother.

My contention is that such codings of the experience of horror could be seen as accruing, rather than uncovering, a particular type of signifying value for horror. This value would then act as a patina of psychoanalytically-inscribed operational systems that prosthesise or graft meaning onto the original image. In this respect, psychoanalysis can be seen, not as the ultimate meta-discourse, but instead as an additional source of affect for the viewer. Insofar as it is productive to read the process of viewing horror as a 'pleasure in perversity', its final inscription within the realms of the symbolic and the repressed lead to an analytic cul-de-sac.[17] Whilst such readings open very fertile ground for understanding some of the metaphoric and/or psychological implications of the horror genre, they are reductive in their understanding of horror as a linguistic or symbolic process (and one specifically buried within the constraining limits of the family unit). They do not offer a way into considerations of how horror might be seen as a lived-in experience and, ultimately,

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[17] Ibid., p. 44.

do not engage with notions of the body as sentient flesh. Rather, they leave the body entangled within the semiotics of paternal law.[18]

Nevertheless, Creed herself goes beyond the gendered quality of horror to discuss its workings at a more general level. This is especially useful because it shows that even psychoanalytic readings of the genre are partly preoccupied with the way in which somatic responses may play an important part in the construction of horror. Creed's argument is that the horror film brings about an ontological crisis whereby the subject's 'sense of a unified self' is placed in jeopardy.[19] The moment that is too horrible to watch puts the viewer in direct contact with 'the place of death' and the collapse of all systems of meaning.[20] The disintegration that the horror viewer is faced with can only be surpassed by consciously looking away or not looking at all, a process which reinstitutes the self in its withdrawal of identification with the on-screen image. This spectator is therefore constructed 'in the place of horror', a space where 'pleasure in looking is transformed into pain and the spectator is punished for his/her voyeuristic desires'.[21] If this idea is not entirely unproblematic—i.e. what happens, for instance, when we do not look away, or if this choice is made on other grounds?— Creed already vouches for a relationship of identification between two contingent spaces, that of the body and that of the screen.[22] Scopophilic pleasure is available because identification is made possible at a sensual level. In other words,

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[18] Ibid., p. 63. These readings can sometimes feel misleading in their sexualisation of images that would seem initially bereft of such messages. The famous scene where a baby alien bursts out of Kane's chest in *Alien* (Ridley Scott, 1979) is thus interpreted as a moment of 'violat[ion] in act of phallic penetration' (p. 56), but it is at least arguable whether this is what causes the moment of horror in the first instance. It is more interesting to see such suggestions as potential addenda to the initial moment of affect. Psychoanalysis would account for the reason, perhaps, why a particular scene may be able to haunt viewers way beyond their exposition to certain images.

[19] Ibid., p. 65.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid., p. 64.

[22] For a thorough challenge to customary understandings of the process of looking away in horror and its reading as a potentially empowering choice see Brigid Cherry, 'Refusing to Refuse to Look: Female Viewers of the Horror Film', in *Identifying Hollywood Audiences*, ed. by Richard Maltby and Melvyn Stokes (London: BFI, 1999), pp. 187-203.

both bodies, spectatorial and human, collapse and integrate through the magnetising force of the binaric system gaze/image. Creed maintains that when the body of the spectator is threatened with dissolution, it is forced to pull away and redraft its limits. What I would add to this is that such a dissolution need not be confined to the remit of the symbolic, but that it might actually be steeped in very solid corporeal terms. In fact, Creed proposes the fact that punishment of one of the bodies incurs in a shared experience of retroactive pain, thus situating identification with the filmic body at the heart of the horror experience: the spectatorial body can be inscribed within the sensorial framework that the film activates. This is a position that cognitivism goes on to develop on different grounds.

Cognitivism and Thought Theory

Noël Carroll's seminal *The Philosophy of Horror, or Paradoxes of the Heart* (1990), the most important of the cognitivist interventions in the field of horror, can be read as a direct response to the limiting validity of psychoanalytical readings of the genre. Its analysis of the consumption of horror film offers an initial appraisal of the implications of the bodily process inherent to it. Carroll's ideas also pave the way for an affect theory of horror in their championing of an understanding of the genre that would emphasise the emotional effects, the 'visceral revulsion' and the 'powerful physical response(s)' that it instigates within the audience.[23] In this light, 'art-horror', or the emotion of fear caused by fictional horror, due to its intensity and brevity, is seen as an occurring emotional state rather than a dispositional one, one that is

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[23] Carroll, *Philosophy of Horror*, p. 19. It is relevant that Carroll's theory emphasises its 'desired' effect on the audience rather than its 'actual' effect, as this allows for individual non-normative responses to the genre.

intimately related to both physical and cognitive processes.[24] It is physical because it carries 'a sense of physiological moving', 'a felt agitation or feeling sensation'; it is cognitive because the physical state needs to be triggered by an evaluation of the object (or concept) of horror and its concatenated thought-processes.[25] Carroll argues that horror's identifying trait is its capacity to emote, to instil affect. The predominance of affect is therefore understood as the base for its recognisable status in opposition to other genres that may also use it.[26]

Carroll consequently explores affect in horror film, but he does this by problematically aligning the feeling of art-horror with the figure of the monster and its capacity to elicit a response from the spectator, whose expected reaction is exemplified by the response of the intradiegetic characters.[27] This powerful rejection of the customary identification process brings about an interesting alignment between intradiegetic character and spectator that by-passes accounts of the psycho-sexual workings of horror: in this system the spectator can be said to pre-empt the characters' reactions. Sadistic understandings of horror become difficult to substantiate when the sadism is not scripted directly onto the film itself. The fact that the main character, traditionally a woman, is meant to reproduce the shock or fear felt by the spectator further problematises previous conceptions of alignment between monster and male viewer.[28] However, ground-breaking as this theory undoubtedly is, it still fails to contain post-millennial horror. In films like *Saw*, monsters are purely human and often

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[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid., p. 27.

[26] Ibid., p. 14.

[27] Ibid., pp. 17-8. New surveys of horror like Mark Sipos, *Horror Film Aesthetics: Creating the Visual Language of Fear* (London and Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2010), p. 12, show that the influence of the monster-model is far from fading in the study of the genre.

[28] This idea had been challenged three years prior to the publication of Carroll's book by Clover's influential 'Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film', *Representations*, 20 (1987), 187-228, but since the basis for this article is the gender dynamics established through the institutionalisation of the 'final girl', I am not considering it here.

likable (Jigsaw has been sold as a humanist vigilante and not a killer), and they might even live next door. Furthermore, the fact that a film like *Saw IV* (Darren Lynn Bousman, 2007) can instil fear, shock and disgust without a central monstrous figure (the closest we come to one is the structural death machine that manages to survive despite Jigsaw's physical death) would seem to undermine the logic that affect can only be created through a horrific creature. Carroll also understands the monstrous as necessarily impure, or, drawing on the work of Mary Douglas, as socio-culturally interstitial.[29] Clearly sidestepping Kristeva, he focuses on the relevance of the monsters' lack of social referentiality, or how they are not classifiable under any known cultural categories. Carroll believes this is part and parcel of why monsters are meant to cause revulsion and abhorrence: their unclean social nature makes them unintelligible. However, and as I have explained, killers like Jigsaw or the murderer in *Captivity* (Roland Joffé, 2007) can captivate precisely through their lack of interstitiality and their very human appeal. 'Monstering' the sensation of affect may thus be a useful tool in relation to the filmic productions of previous decades, as with the rise of the Universal Pictures monster films, but it does not embrace the more problematic figure of the sympathetic killer. It also fails to acknowledge affect as instilled by non-othered agencies, as in, for example, the surrealistic self-harming scenes in *Black Swan* (Darren Aronofsky, 2011).

Carroll himself points out the limitations of equating the monster with affect. He makes it quite clear that art-horror would not be able to work through the sense of threat alone. Instead, it is disgust that enables the emotional state of art-horror and

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[29] Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, pp. 32-3, 43; Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 1966).

keeps it from being reducible to 'shock', or what has been called the 'startle effect'.[30] This idea is particularly useful when we compare the actual state of the genre to its precursors: a film like *Cat People* (Jacques Tourneur, 1942), which relies on suggestion and shock to instil horror, works in a markedly different way from *Saw IV*, which is heavily dependent on the capacity of its images to disgust. Paradoxically, even though Carroll himself would suggest that *Saw IV* does not constitute art-horror because it lacks a monstrous figure that stands for the unknown, following his theory of physical-cognitive horror as connected to disgust would lead us to disregard a horror classic like *Cat People*. Whether a consequence of the changes in the cinematic apparatus, or precisely because of its implied, rather than explicit, images, the film may still produce fear and shock in some but would most certainly not generate disgust in modern audiences. Moreover, the figure of Irena as panther is not monstrous per se, since she resembles a real panther and therefore cannot qualify as interstitial or defiling. If the thought of Irena-as-panther is what is being defined as interstitial and disgust-inducing, then we should be able to extrapolate this knowledge to the image of Irena-as-woman. The casting of the beautiful Simone Simon signals that this was probably not the director's intention.

It would seem that, in his rejection of an events-based theory of the genre, Carroll is impelled to construct the monster as the unique object of horror, and this has an obvious drawback: fear and disgust are not always constructed around the image or notion of the monster. However, his subsequent development of a 'thought theory of emotional responses to fiction' is crucial to later developments of affect theory.[31] It initially appears as a possible solution to the unsatisfying conclusions derived from the

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[30] Ronald C. Simons, *Boo! Culture, Experience, and the Startle Effect* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 82-3; Robert Baird, 'The Startle Effect: Implications for Spectator Cognition and Media Theory', *Film Quarterly*, 53 (2000), 12-24.
[31] Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, p. 79.

'illusion theory of fiction', where the spectator truly believes for a moment that the monster is real, and the 'pretend theory of fictional response', where fear is invoked through a conscious play akin to the literary suspension of disbelief.[32] According to thought theory, spectators are not so much scared by the event(s) of horror as they are by the content or mental image encouraged by the cognitive process: it is the content of thought, the process of thinking (or attempting not to think) about the representation of an object of horror that can be felt as a genuine emotion (i.e. the consequent emotional state).[33] Belief does not enter this particular scenario; the fact that we can entertain those thoughts is enough to bring about the moment of horror. This is advantageous, as Carroll notes, because it allows us to escape the critical solipsism we had previously encountered, namely that the horror felt through this process can be genuine without having to derive from an actual belief in the reality of the object of horror. It also helps redefine the moment of identification as one of assimilation of the characters' situation. One does not *become* the character, not even temporarily, and the bodies do not become co-extensive or concomitant. Rather, through their external position, all that spectators require is to perceive the situation as carnally intelligible in order to internalise it.

Despite the obvious advantage of such a conceptualisation of the feeling of filmic fear, thought-theory as developed by Carroll necessarily excludes too much. Concepts like 'dread', for example, or the fear created through the efficacious use of editing in an affective chase scene, are necessarily neglected. It is more productive to see the thought process behind art-horror as encompassing the event of horror (whether it be the appearance of the vampire, the act of torture or the thought of severing one's own foot) than as a mere reaction to the encounter of the horrific

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[32] Ibid., p. 72.
[33] Ibid., pp. 80-1.

creature. Most importantly, this definition of art-horror does not allow for desire to enter the cognitive equation fully. As Carroll explains, '[t]hough wants and desires may figure in the characterization of some emotions, the core structure of emotions involves physical agitations caused by the construals and evaluations that serve constitutively to identify the emotion as the specific emotion it is'.[34] Whilst it may be true that not 'every emotion is linked up with a desire', there is a way in which desire can be seen as the kernel for the curious fascination that Carroll identifies elsewhere.[35] In this respect, Carroll betrays his own thinking when he comments on the link between horror film and the unknown: these fictions are obsessed with substantiating what cannot be, which in Carroll's understanding means the monstrous presence. They also, in that very pressing urge, try to render the unknowable a 'known' by visualising the monster and making his/her presence undeniable.[36] For Carroll, disgust is the fly in the ointment, what we must endure in order to attain the satisfaction of the unknown revealed as known.

My contention is that pain has become Carroll's unknown known, that post-millennial horror uses corporeal disgust as its object of curiosity. Art-horror is not 'the price we are willing to pay for the revelation of that which is impossible and unknown, of that which violates our conceptual schema', but rather the object of its teleological process.[37] If, as Mark Seltzer argued, we live in a wound culture in which pain has become prime entertainment and 'the very idea of "the public" has become inseparable from spectacles of bodily and mass violence', the object of art-horror inevitably becomes the non-monstrous body.[38] Carroll's theory, despite its otherwise

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[34] Ibid., p. 27.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid., p. 127.
[37] Ibid., p. 186.
[38] Mark Seltzer, *Serial Killers: Death and Life in America's Wound Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 21.

pioneering ideas on the need for a more progressive understanding of horror, seems caught up in two common critical prejudices: the assumption that the audience would not want to put themselves through 'negative emotions', and, therefore, that the pleasure gained from the experience of horror should act as some form of additional affect.[39] What is evacuated from such theories is the possibility that audiences actively seek the moment of art-horror for its 'pain', the ratiocination to be found in a masochistic encounter with disgust. This is precisely the territory of post-millennial horror.

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[39] Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, p. 193.

Section 2. Reclaiming Corporeality

Phenomenology and the Lived Body

This project seeks for a spectatorial model that will acknowledge the carnal reality of the processes behind the consumption of affective corporeal transgression in post-millennial horror. Phenomenology, by putting the body at the centre of the living experience (or lived body), provides an empirical springboard for such an endeavour. Although, as a discipline, it was initially developed by Edmund Husserl, most cinematic critical approaches have relied on the work of French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty.[40] His form of phenomenology is particularly useful because it acknowledges 'the act of viewing as experienced from within' as one of the basic constituents of the lived body, and it thus offers good ground for filmic appropriations that see the experience of viewing films as a working extrapolation.[41] This means that the projection of a film, or its reproduction through DVD players, is not as important as the fact that spectators are inherent participants of the filmic exchange in their capacity to see the events. This accounts for the potential in corporeal transgression to affect bodies outside of the traditional cinema theatre. Phenomenology is also concerned with giving accurate descriptions of lived body experience, since it understands the subject as knowing itself only through the 'mediation of the body'.[42] In this respect, because corporeality is seen as crucial to the experience of being in the

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[40] With the notable exception of Allan Casebier, *Film and Phenomenology: Toward a Realist Theory of Cinematic Representation* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[41] Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 136. Merleau-Ponty already pointed to this in 'The Film and the New Psychology', in *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), pp. 48-59.

[42] Gary Brent Madison, 'Did Merleau-Ponty Have a Theory of Perception?', in *Merleau-Ponty, Hermeneutics, and Postmodernism*, ed. by Thomas Busch and Shaun Gallagher (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), pp. 83-107 (p. 94).

world, it offers a starting point for a conceptualisation of cinematic affect as based on the body of the viewer.

Through the pioneering work of Vivian Sobchack, phenomenology has brought the corporeal awareness missing from psychoanalytic and cognitive disciplines into the realm of cinematic experience. This has not merely entailed the introduction of an anti-representational approach through what Sobchack understands as the film's body, or the film's material and introceptive life, but also a challenge to the passive model of spectatorship premised by the predominant modes of intellectual enquiry discussed in the two previous sections.[43] Arguing that sight or vision, which is not an isolated sense, has been undeservedly prioritised in academic discourse, Sobchack proposes that films are perceived with our entire bodies and that there is thus a pressing need to write 'carnal knowledge' back into the spectatorial experience.[44] This form of carnal thinking is foundational, for it is one that informs subsequent conscious analyses of film, and should therefore be taken as more than a mere acceptance that the body plays a role in the experience of viewing films.[45] Even more importantly, because the cinematic moment is very explicitly separated from ordinary life through setting and purpose, it can arouse specific feelings. These are incited by producers, cinematographers or directors through specific uses of cameras, alignments, points of view, special effects, and etcetera. It is through this intentional interplay between desired affect and film that, in Sobchack's words, 'our naturalized sensory hierarchy and habitual sensual economy are altered and rearranged'.[46]

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[43] Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye*, p. 223.
[44] Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (London , Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004),p. 63.
[45] Ibid., p. 60.
[46] Ibid., p. 80.

Whilst such an understanding of cinema is applicable to every film, for they all have thinking human beings as their ideal consumers, Sobchack also proposes that certain films may have a more direct or obvious impact on the body. She labels this type of cinema 'physical' and argues that:

> Those films grouped by Williams as 'body genres' foreground sensual engagement in explicit image and sound content and narrative focus, as well as in a more backgrounded manner – that is, through the kinetic activity and sensory experience of [...] the 'film's body' [...]. Other films may show us bodies in sensual engagement but do so in a non-sensual manner, thus distancing us rather than soliciting a similar experience through the 'attitude' of their mediating vision.[47]

Sobchack expands this corporeal approach through the introduction of the feeling of disgust or the sensation of being 'sickened', which she very explicitly defines as 'hardly ever the outcome of a thought'.[48] This means, on the one hand, that there is a way in which we can think of some corporeal genres as by-passing conscious thought and acting directly on the somatic aspects of the body. On the other hand, we may also infer that such spectatorial reactions as recoiling in disgust attest 'to the literal body's reciprocal and reversible relations to the figures on the screen'.[49] This understanding of the intradiegetic body as aligned with that of the spectator's will become particularly relevant in my later discussion of the connections between bodily horror and actual pain, but it is important to note here that certain genres, horror particularly, may attempt to make as direct a use of the 'mimetic sympathy' ensuing from the

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[47] Ibid., p. 255, 62, n. 39.
[48] Ibid., p. 79.
[49] Ibid., p. 79.

zones of encounter between filmic and viewing bodies.[50] As a genre deeply invested in the creation of fear, horror is particularly concerned with the 'spectator's somatic experience and its concomitant pleasures'.[51]

Phenomenology is also a useful methodological backbone on which to rest the return to the organic body through the experience of bodily horror because it accounts for the intelligibility of existence through subjective interconnections. This awareness also acts as corporeal reassurance, since, as Merleau-Ponty has explained, it shows how another 'living body has the same structure as mine'.[52] It therefore acts, indirectly, as an acknowledgement of the process whereby vicariousness is elicited, or the somatic empathy that we might feel when contemplating violence being perpetrated upon the bodies of other living creatures. Sobchack, who has devoted very little space to a phenomenologically-inflected study of affective corporeal transgression, has nevertheless referred to the limits of embodied film experience. Whilst her argument that the spectator can become 'rapt in the film's vision' through the 'difference between the spectator's morality and situation and the film's materiality and situation', her conclusions are somewhat limiting. According to Sobchack, when films consciously decide to exploit 'carnage and seem[...] impervious to the human blood and gore', the spectator can either share this 'inhumane interest', or break the visual engagement and refuse to 'share in a look that behaves with no subjective awareness of what it is to bleed or be in physical pain'.[53] I would like to argue that, whilst mutilation may create an overwhelming feeling that could prompt the spectator to look away, engaging in sequences of corporeal

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[50] Ibid., p. 76. This mimesis need not require the translation of thought and may thus be entirely somatic. See Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 19-32.

[51] Hanich, *Cinematic Emotion*, p. 15.

[52] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 412.

[53] Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye*, pp. 288-9.

transgression is not tantamount to conscious partaking. This is not merely to claim that choosing to watch a violent scene might not always be a decision premised on the whole film (sometimes a single sequence might be the problem) or that the active decision to enjoy the violence should not be equated to inhuman curiosity. The main problem is that Sobchack does not fully address the somatic side of the horror film.

Matt Hills acknowledges the importance of this viscerality in *The Pleasures of Horror* (2005), but it is the work of Julian Hanich that has come the closest to addressing this issue from a phenomenological standpoint.[54] Hanich understands 'somatic empathy' as created by 'direct horror', that is, by the immediacy (the here and now) of the attack on an on-screen character which may be subdivided into three types of mimicry: sensation, motor and affective.[55] The second one, motor mimicry, is explained through the desire to reach out to the character and tense our own body in a similar fashion. This type of somatic empathy is best exemplified through the lighter-recovering scene in *Strangers on a Train* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1951), as the spectator follows the painstaking stretching of an arm through a grid that impairs movement. This could, however, also be applied to more common feelings in the horror film, like that of wanting to run or cower from a potential threat. The third type, affective mimicry, is the pre-cognitive state whereby emotion from a character is replicated by the viewer.[56] Thus, faces may be altered to reflect the fear or pain expressed by them. This has some bearing on my own theorisation of affective corporeal transgression, since scenes of mutilation are often intercut with images of the pain as suffered by the character. These tend to focus on facial reactions of the moment of pain, and may even, in the case of *Saw*, replace the actual moment of mutilation itself. As I will

[54] Hills, *The Pleasures of Horror*, pp. 13-32
[55] Hanich, *Cinematic Emotion*, pp. 82, 182.
[56] Ibid., p. 183.

argue, the fact that these are often offered in close-up is relevant, and we should more generally consider how the wound is treated as a zone of affective mimicry. But Hanich's most interesting contribution to the field of somatic empathy is the notion of sensation mimicry. He describes this as the moment when 'I involuntarily and without reflection replicate a similar sensation as the character onscreen: a slimy parasite entering [an] ear, a hot needle piercing an eye'.[57] Interestingly, in a work so invested in the taxonomy of horror, the intricacies of the moment of sensation mimicry are largely left unexplored. Why is sensation mimicry sparked, even when the onscreen body is not ours and may not even remotely look like us? How can we account for sensations so extreme that they escape the experiential horizon of the spectator?

Ultimately, for Hanich, cinematic horror is different from the somatic empathy that the broken body may generate in the spectator. In this way, he compares the bone protruding from a leg in *The Descent* (Neil Marshall, 2005) to the very specific and human attack on the character in *House of 1000 Corpses* (Rob Zombie, 2003). For Hanich, it is the 'intentional and disproportional immorality in combination with disturbing brutality' that sets apart such moments from the more pain-focused somatic empathy.[58] This accounts for the impracticality of terming affective corporeal transgression 'fear': this feeling is normally premised on sensations that rely on slow build-ups of suspense or gloomy atmospheres, rather than on more direct visual scenes. It also helps explain why natural disasters, which also cause feelings of tension and anxiety, may not qualify either. The distance and lack of corporeal or intimate contact between the spectator and the disembodied disaster means that fear cannot be filtered through the notion of immorality or brutality. Equally, morality is shown as important in the creation of direct affect, but only insofar as immorality

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[57] Ibid., p. 182.
[58] Ibid., p. 83.

enhances the reception of fear. I will be suggesting that the ethical implication of the spectator may also be important when attempting to create a surplus of affect on the viewer, even if morality does not immdiately come into question when assessing the disturbing potential of mutilation.

These theoretical limitations are due to the fact that Julian Hanich is considering the genre at large, and more specifically addressing the almost abstract notion of fear. Whilst I would not want to argue that somatic empathy defines all contemporary horror, its aesthetic and influence beyond subgenres like torture porn and into the mainstream shows signs of horror's increasing visceral import. Ultimately, even if Hanich is prepared to argue for the somatic quality of the genre, his definition of horror rests on 'a separation between *horrifying* and *disgusting* moving-images'.[59] His ideas end up in a demarcation that does not fully account for the affective sensation at hand in this thesis. Whilst the corporeality of moments of somatic empathy brought about by direct horror rest on very physical pain-inducing images, this does not mean that these sequences cannot work in isolation. My model allows for their use outside the genre with similar results. The aforementioned *Black Swan* or Lars von Trier's *Antichrist* (2008) play with horror conventions without being genre pieces; their emphasis is not the mere creation of fear. Yet these films make use of somatic empathy to create affect. Corporeal transgression in the form of a clitoris being excised with knitting scissors or strips of skin being pulled out from a woman's hand are present in both films, and in both instances may generate a very physical reaction. This, however, would not be enough to characterise these scenes as horror, were they not framed as such. Their bloodiness and suddenness, accentuated through cinematographic decisions like use of camera angle, shot or music, contribute to the

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[59] Ibid., p. 85.

species of corporeal affect exploited more extensively in *Saw* and *Hostel*. Although my model is more concerned with the films that use such instances heavily or premise their plots along similarly visceral climaxes, the affective corporeal model has the advantage that it does not deny its appearance in films which fall outside the horror genre.

It is also worth noting that the sensory and emotional gamut of horror films is vast, since they may induce anything from tears to laughter. I therefore assume a very specific approach: horror films mean to horrify, disgust or scare the spectator; only techniques which are put to that aim will be considered here. I am thus very specifically writing about somatic empathy at its most visceral and corporeal, and thus, in a sense, about the sensation mimicry developed by Hanich. It is precisely under this light that the writings of Deleuze and Guattari and Shaviro on cinematic affect become necessary to understand the type of bodily effect that the horrific experience of art-horror might be trying to instil in its consumer. As Sobchack herself has acknowledged, phenomenologists have had to accept their lack of ability to explain the somatism provoked by bodily responses to cinema 'as anything more than "mere" physiological reflex'.[60] If we can start tracing carnal investment in the creation of anxiety or disgust, we have yet to unravel my opening question: how is the spectatorial body affected by sequences of mutilation and what, more precisely, may be causing affect on the spectatorial body? Affect, as I move on to show, needs to be reconsidered less as a cognitive process and more as a somatic response. The body can be affected, and the mind becomes one of the many vectors through which affect enters sentient flesh.

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[60] Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts*, p. 58.

Deleuze and Affect Theory

The prevalence and impact of mutilation in successful contemporary horror subgenres like torture porn offers a perfect case study for the relevance of the phenomenological shift in perceptions of the body. It is thus not coincidental that attempts at applying psychoanalysis to the torture porn phenomenon have rendered predictable results. Stephen T. Asma, for example, understands the appeal of films like *Hostel* as a process of 'purging of anxieties' or repressed 'mysterious tastes and predilections inside us, which get satisfied only by indulgence in the grisly and the macabre'.[61] For Asma, what is new and different about torture porn is that it introduces 'previously unimaginable images of vulnerability'.[62] This explanation is unsatisfactory for more than one reason: firstly, like Carroll, Asma's theory, though useful to explain the appeal of watching horror, still fails to come to terms with the workings of its graphic images. Reducing the horror experience to a form of catharsis or end-experience ignores the process of watching itself, as well as the viscerality to be found in torture porn. In fact, the case has been made that horror can be better understood as a 'tonic' and not a purgative, for it allows us 'to experience the lived-body transformations that are characteristic of being emotional'.[63] Secondly, and as I will argue in the next section, torture porn does not introduce corporeal vulnerability any more than exploitation films from the 1970s did. In fact, many of the most successful horror blockbusters in the 2000s – *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Marcus Niespel, 2003), *The Hills Have Eyes* (Alexandre Aja, 2006), *The Last House on the Left* (Denis Iliadis, 2009) – were remakes of classics of this particular subgenre. I therefore propose that

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[61] Stephen T. Asma, *On Monsters: An Unnatural History of Our Worst Fears* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 197, 194.
[62] Ibid., p. 197.
[63] Hanich, *Cinematic Emotion*, pp. 12, 9.

what is characteristic about torture porn is its extreme investment in affect, particularly the type articulated through mutilation.

Such a proposition resonates more widely with recent interventions in horror criticism that have expressed the need to apprehend the affective side of horror. These have invariably noted the importance of anticipatory moods and objectless anxiety, special effects, set designs or music to the experience and pleasures of watching horror films.[64] If horror had previously been understood in terms of repressed content and impure material returning in the guise of cinematic ritual, it is may now be seen as a genre that

> deal[s] primarily in the production affects, affects evoked by taboos, shocks, suspense, and violence, by the promise and delivery of blood and gore, by repulsive eviscerations, decapitations, and destructions of bodies on screen and calibrated through an array of special effects.[65]

Affect theory provides a useful framework for reading torture porn precisely because it accounts for its capacity to have a direct impact upon audiences. Torture porn thus becomes a type of filmic subgenre that 'exceeds the symbolic properties of both languages and image', and 'stimulat[es] a kind of thought that leads away from preconceptions into the realm of non-symbolic ideation, or "intuition"'.[66] An understanding of the film as an affective corporeal experience that will encompass 'participation' and the 'visceral, sensory nature of viewing' is, as Anna Powell has

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[64] Hills, *The Pleasures of Horror*, pp. 24-32; Mathijs, E. (2010), 'They're Here!: Special Effects in Horror Cinema of the 1970s and 1980s', in *Horror Zone: The Cultural Experience of Contemporary Horror Cinema*, ed. by Ian Conrich (London and New York, NY: I.B. Tauris, 2010), pp. 153-71; Tamao Nakahara, 'Making up Monsters: Set and Costume Design in Horror Films', in *Horror Zone*, pp. 139-51; *Music in the Horror Film: Listening to Fear*, ed. by Neil Lerner (Abingdon and New York, NY: Routledge, 2010).

[65] Fred Botting, 'A-ffect-less: Zombie-Horror-Shock', *English Language Notes*, 48 (2010), 177-90 (p. 180).

[66] Anna Powell, *Deleuze and Horror Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), pp. 11, 12.

explained, necessary to a broader theory of the corporeal effect of the horror film.[67] Deleuzian theory sheds light on the workings of torture-horror by explaining the genre's somatic impact on the body at a level which is not directly accessible through representational enquiries. By acknowledging, following Spinoza, the 'latitude' of the body, or 'the sum total of the intensive affects it is capable of at a given power or degree of potential', Deleuze and Guattari draw attention to the lived body experience enunciated by the phenomenologists.[68] In their philosophy, the body is seen as '[n]othing but affects and local movements', with the former being moments of 'prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another'.[69] Similarly, man is considered 'a compound of percepts and affects'.[70] It should be plain to see how a theory that aims to explore the affective side of cinema might expand existing knowledge of the viewer and the experiential processes evinced in the act of watching horror films. As such, this theory should be contemplated as complementary to psychoanalysis, and not as a metatheory to explain all forms of filmic horror. Rather, through a focus on specific extreme cases like that of torture porn, it becomes apparent that the genre uses the body to 'evok[e] feelings of engulfment' or 'blur[...] boundaries between film and audience'.[71]

The question is, then, how a Deleuzian understanding of affect actually helps in the configuration of an affective corporeal theory of the horror experience. Claire Colebrook, writing on affect in Deleuze, points to the way in which affect in art displays an unusually disembodied yet simultaneously lived experience:

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[67] Ibid., p. 17.

[68] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. by Brian Massumi (London and New York: Continuum, 2010), p. 287.

[69] Ibid., pp. 287, xvii.

[70] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. by Graham Burchell and Hugh Tomlinson (London and New York: Verso, 1994), p. 164.

[71] Botting, 'A-ffect-less', p. 180.

> Affections are what happens to us (disgust, or the recoil of the nostrils at the smell of cheese); perceptions are what we receive (odour, or the smell itself). Affects and percepts, in art, free these forces from the particular observers or bodies who experience them. At its simplest level imagine the presentation of 'fear' in a novel, even though it is not we who are afraid. Affects are sensible experiences in their *singularity*, liberated from organising systems of representation. A poem might create the affect of fear without an object feared, a reason, or a person who is afraid.[72]

The generation of affect becomes disruptive. It slices through the referential chains that tie experience to words. This does not involve a process of laying bare the workings of an unknown real, but a direct confrontation with it. In fact, Colebrook goes on to argue that what makes art is not content but affect itself, or as she puts it, 'the sensible force or style through which it produces content'.[73] This phenomenon can be seen as a literalisation of the body in horror film, a process whereby bodily affections are legitimated as 'movements of passion' and not as objects in need of decoding.[74] Deleuze and Guattari describe such affects as 'nonhuman becomings of man', these becomings being 'not the passage from one lived state to another' but rather 'an extreme contiguity within a coupling of two sensations without resemblance or, on the contrary, in the distance of a light that captures both of them in a single reflection'.[75] They see this process as one of organic progression rather than one of transmutation, a moment of passage deeply invested in sensation as intrinsically related to the effect of art on the human. It is art that can bring about the zones of indiscernibility that allow for the potential of becoming to materialise. In the case of

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[72] Claire Colebrook, *Gilles Deleuze* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 22-3.
[73] Ibid., pp. 24-5.
[74] Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body*, p. 129.
[75] Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy*, pp. 169, 173.

corporeal horror, affect works by pushing the spectator into a moment of becoming meat that does not, for obvious reasons, incur a direct transmogrification into meat. Affect starts a process of passage for audiences, who are both aware of their human nature as spectators whilst sensorially compelled to rejoice in the organic side of their body, or the non-subjective. Affect is thus essentially a state of feeling which is simultaneously emotionless, since it trades in intensities, or what Barbara M. Kennedy has called 'pathic, proto-subjective state[s] which [are] not owned by the subject'.[76]

Brian Massumi has further refined Deleuzian affect as I am suggesting it be applied to horror. One of Massumi's most important evaluations of the notion of affect is his definition of it as contiguous with intensity and as completely separate from the order of emotions. Whilst intensity is in itself an 'emotional state', it is characterised by its non-linear rupture of the linear progress of life: it disturbs the present state of the body.[77] According to Massumi, what we call affect is effectively 'the coupling of a unit of quasi corporeality with a unit of passion'.[78] Affect is both, and at the same time,

> an ability to affect and a susceptibility to be affected. An *emotion* or *feeling* is a recognized affect, an identified intensity as reinjected into stimulus-response paths, into action-reaction circuits of infolding and externalization – in short, into subject-object relations. Emotion is a contamination of empirical space by affect.[79]

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[76] Barbara M. Kennedy, *Deleuze and Cinema: The Aesthetics of Sensation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), p. 102.
[77] Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (London and Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), p. 26.
[78] Ibid., p. 61. 'Passion' is here understood as a state of intensity different from passivity or activity where affection is perceived as sensation. See Kennedy, *Deleuze and Cinema*, p. 101.
[79] Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, p. 61.

Thus, and whilst the constant intrusion of affect may result in its conversion to a form of second-hand emotion, affect is primordially an unrecognised recognition: the mutilated body is not one with which we might necessarily have come into subjective empirical contact—we may not, for example, have had our Achilles' tendons sliced, as Josh does in *Hostel*—but the impact that this scene may have on us is testimony to the uncanny nature of affect. This is the reason Colebrook calls affect 'a form of pre-personal perception'.[80] Affect is intensive and involuntary, and therefore response is always prior to the moment of conscious decision. Massumi connects this notion of immediacy with that of 'visceral perception' or 'interoception'.[81] Interoception, the way in which internal organs can be said to perceive affect or external sensations are necessarily connected to psychosomatic processes; it comes before their apprehension at a cognitive level. This is the case because viscerality registers intensity, which bypasses the brain and can be perceived internally before it is duly decoded at thought level. Visceral products thus appeal to this interoceptive quality of bodies: it is not that the mind is rejected. In fact, my cursory look at Carroll has shown that cognitive theories have indeed accounted for some of our current understanding of horror. Instead, I would argue that viscerality is one of the constitutive elements of the horror experience.

The spectatorial body is deeply affected by the image and feeling of what is virtually not there: a second body or bodies that have a direct impact on it. The fact that the spectatorial body can be viscerally affected by an image of intense violence external to its direct sensorial field means that this experience is one invested in potentiality, not facticity. Affect thus becomes 'the simultaneous participation of the virtual in the actual and the actual in the virtual, as one arises from and returns to the

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[80] Colebrook, *Gilles Deleuze*, p. 38.
[81] Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, p. 60.

other'.[82] The power of corporeal horror resides in its capacity to affect corporeally by making the fictional body a virtuality, a potential body-in-suffering that can be consumed. Alignment with the on-screen body is therefore crucial for affect to occur. If there is no space for a full account of Massumi's ideas on psycho-dynamic affect here, the viscerality and the potentiality of the fictional body are Deleuzian aspects that have persisted in discussions of the cinematic body and which are particularly useful for my consideration of the 'affected' spectatorial body of horror. The post-Deleuzian understanding of affect that concerns me in this thesis has permeated recent philosophical enquiries of film and the arts. We have seen that Massumi, in particular, has worked on a theorisation of affect that is a direct heir to Deleuze's, and also one which distinguishes between emotion and affect. As detailed below, Steven Shaviro's influential application of affect theory to horror extends, expands and clarifies the relationship between the genre and its investment in corporeal transgression.

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[82] Ibid., p. 35.

Section 3. Affective Corporeal Transgression

Shaviro and Cinematic Affect

In *The Cinematic Body* (1993), Steven Shaviro sets up a 'paralogical strategy' for understanding the cinematic apparatus and its 'symbiotic and parasitic interpenetration' with the body.[83] Shaviro's theory is based around affect and champions a 'counteraesthetics grounded in shock, hilarity, relentless violence, delirious behaviourism, contagion, tactile participation, and aimless, hysterical frenzy'.[84] This 'psychophysiology of cinematic experience' is the beginning of a project that aims to explore how images and film might amplify subjectivity or corporeal sensation.[85] In other words, Shaviro's is a 'materialistic semiotics' that draws upon Walter Benjamin's 'tactile appropriation' whilst shifting the focus to the body of the viewer and its inner workings, these being areas particularly neglected by psychoanalysis.[86] According to Shaviro, mass media, the digital age and our technological relation to the world have had different consequences from those commonly considered in assessments of postmodern culture. Rather than drive us away from reality and into a world of simulacra and hyperreality conducive to the waning of affect, these images put us in direct contact with the fibre of life. They show us how the body 'mutates into new forms, and is pushed to new thresholds of intense, masochistic sensation', how we might understand 'visceral immediacy as an *effect* of simulation'.[87] Modern body horror films are affect machines that exalt,

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[83] Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body*, pp. 266, 264.
[84] Ibid., p. 103
[85] Ibid., p. 53.
[86] Ibid., p. 51.
[87] Ibid., pp. 138-9, 5. For a more extended discussion of the masochistic relation between torture-horror and its spectators see Dean Lockwood, 'All Stripped Down: The Spectacle of Torture Porn', *Popular Communication*, 7 (2009), 40-8. I ascribe to his view that torture-horror, rather than offering a purely moralistic message, 'amplif[ies] horror's potential to shake us out of our subjective security' (p. 46).

enthral, 'manufactur[e] and articulat[e] lived experience'.[88] Instead of erasing the body or subjugating it to a kingdom of flattened images, they engage the body in novel procedures invested in intensity, excitation and excess. This understanding of horror is thus particularly valuable when applied to the genre after the turn of the century, with its emphasis on realistic mutilation and its foregrounding of affective corporeality.

For Shaviro, horror operates by 'destroy[ing] customary meaning and appearances, ruptur[ing] the surfaces of the flesh, and violat[ing] the organic integrity of the body'.[89] He explains the process of contact between affective images and the body as one of abjection dependent on a masochistic need: '[t]he flesh becomes ever more alien and unassimilable, inspiring vertigo and nausea. There is no longer any clear distinction between inside and outside. I am disgusted, terrified. But I need, I *want* this closeness and this vertigo'.[90] The contact between the filmic reel and the flesh is thus a physical one. For Shaviro, the cinematic experience can foreground abjection precisely because the body it depends on is itself 'at once captivating and violently repulsive'.[91] Horror brings this contingency out into the open as it brings bodies, both filmic and fleshly, into contact with one another. This moment of continuity and flow is where representation folds away and turns into something that cannot be conceptualised. This particular envisioning of the cinematic experience is particularly relevant because it relates to Carroll's thought theory. Where Carroll understands the thought of the object/experience as the main somatic catalyst of horror, Shaviro sees the process of knowing life in thought through the body. In other words, the mimesis in horror film ignites a Deleuzian plane of immanence where

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[88] Steven Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect* (Ropley: Zer0 Books, 2011), p. 2.
[89] Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body*, p. 102.
[90] Ibid., p. 260.
[91] Ibid.

thought and body are brought together in a thorough debunking of Cartesian dualism. Flesh becomes the stimulus for thought in a retroactive process that resembles instinctive reactions to pain: flesh as a condition for thought, a 'shameful passion for abject self-disintegration' that is radically opposed to identification.[92] Post-millennial horror, in its even more obvious corporeal investment, stages not so much a return of the Freudian repressed as a return of the *repressed body*. Post-millennial horror attempts to reinscribe the body in all its abjection, not in its abjected nature, back into the film/text, and thus aims to short-circuit the distinction between thought and body imposed it by Cartesian models

In Shaviro's account, abjection can become meaning, meaning which is explicitly non-textual and based on physical shock. The horrific experience therefore does not consist of a 'desire [...] which must be repelled for fear of self-annihilation', but rather of a means to self-construction.[93] The body becomes intelligible through an 'othered' encounter with its own workings, its internal machinery. Desire is not revivified in terms of abjection, but concomitant to the process of self-awareness. This 'othered' body that is created by horror leads to an affirmation of what Shaviro terms 'a tactile and voyeuristic fascination', a sense of how 'the cinematic gaze is violently embedded in the flesh'.[94] Images bind the body of the spectator to the body of the image, creating a process of 'nonidentity' and 'disintegration' akin to the potential feeling that films like *Saw* or *Hostel* may instil in viewers.[95] It is important, however, to refine Shaviro's proposition so that we do not disavow the theoretical implications of phenomenology on the grounds of fear's 'emptying out of subjectivity and of

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[92] Ibid., p. 105.
[93] Creed, 'Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine', p. 10.
[94] Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body*, pp. 267, 157.
[95] Ibid., p. 157.

time'.[96] If the systematic emptying out of transcendence and subjectivity necessarily limits us to the corporeal, it does not necessarily follow that the experience of horror cannot resonate later at an entirely different cognitive level. In other words, if it is true that the very 'intimacy of my own body is an exposure, a vulnerability, and not a refuge', we cannot conclude that the subject is left behind in the process of emptying out.[97] The only way in which this situation can be redefined successfully is if we understand Shaviro's process of evacuation as one of simultaneous gain of expenditure and/or excess: if sight is a 'gaping wound, a violation of the integrity of the body', then it is also its main saturator, that which holds it together.[98] If a form of phantasmatic pain is felt in the body, then this is surely a reification of subjectivity, of the fact that eyes or synaptic connections, not to say empathy, still function.

What I propose is an understanding of the visceral process of horror as a reinstatement, through the evacuation of the non-organic body, of subjectivity. I am not claiming that the body is recuperated in the cinematic process at the expense of subjectivity (Shaviro) or that thought processes somehow legitimise somatic reactions (Carroll). Rather, my contention is that, through the disavowal of subjectivity that such images bring about, the self is not lost but instead ratiocinated physiologically, recuperated through a process of distension. What is evacuated is not the body or the self, understood at its most organic level, but rather everything else: the socially constructed or immaterial. Conversely, it is precisely the confusion that arises from the melding of what is normally perceptually felt as distinctive instances of psycho-motor reactions that allows for this feeling. We feel the body as a cohesive and cogent 'whole' in a piecemeal exercise of self-awareness.

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[96] Ibid., p. 149.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid., p. 141.

The Wound as Face

One of *Hostel*'s most controversial scenes features an Asian woman having one of her eyes torched by her maniac torturer. Paxton, who comes to her rescue, is then forced to cut through her optic nerve in order to relieve her agony, and the action concludes with yellow goo spurting out from the bloodied socket. This moment is strongly reminiscent of *Zombie Flesh Eaters* (Lucio Fulci, 1979), a film that also provoked extreme critical reactions from the press and which was eventually banned in the British 'video nasties' scandal.[99] It includes a slow-motion close-up of an eye being penetrated by a wooden stake, a sequence still difficult to watch without repressing a feeling of disgust. Affect is put in motion here precisely through motor reactions that link the body of the spectator and that of the actress. This is not to imply that simple identification is recognisable for this process. In fact, the shot separates the eyes from the body for maximum impact. The close-up of the wound, the eye being torn open, penetrated and disfigured takes the face away from its spatio-temporal coordinates so that it can stop being solely the main actress's possession and becomes the spectator's through vicariousness. In this case, the proximity guarantees that we can perceive that eye as more rightfully ours than if the scene had been shot from further away. This moment also turns the occurrence into a believable potentiality: our own eyes are, to a certain extent, being pierced by that very same stake. Affect works not only analogically, but also intensively. If the close-up is not realistic enough, if the prosthetic devices or special effects are too obvious to the spectator, then affect may be partially lost. The initial disembowelling scene in *Don't Go Near the Park*

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[99] The term 'video nasties' refers to a series of violent videos, mainly horror B-movies or sexploitation tapes, that were in circulation in the UK in the late seventies and early eighties. Since there was no legislation in place to regulate the violent content of tapes, religious organisations and, more famously, social activist Mary Whitehouse, lobbied against these videos under claims of indecency and their potential threat to children. The video nasties scandal culminated with the introduction of the Video Recordings Act in 1984, which applied stricter rules of censorship to commercial video recordings.

(Lawrence D. Foldes, 1981), with dated prosthetics and blood that looks fake to the contemporary spectator, has lost any affective qualities that it could have previously had. It is also entirely necessary that the on-screen body be both de-objectified and perfectly virtual if it is to create affect. The wound, the wreckage of the body part(s), becomes the affective centre of corporeal horror. Whilst this is not exclusive to post-millennial horror, as we can see from Fulci's example, current technological advances and innovative cinematic framing techniques make the violent image of corporeal transgression a lot more immediate and believable. The spectator may, in some cases, be forced to stare at the wound for prolonged periods of time, as is the case with the open brain surgery scene in *Saw III* (Darren Lynn Bousman, 2006).

Out of the extensive taxonomy of possible cinematic images that Deleuze develops in *Cinema 1: The Movement Image* (1983) and *Cinema 2: The Time Image* (1985), the affection-image is the obvious 'paradigmatic site' where 'the connection between the movements of incoming perceptions and outgoing actions' take place.[100] The affection-image becomes the type of cinematic image which, by definition, is the most involved in the creation of affect, of the generating of a 'movement of expression'.[101] The affection-image, precisely because of its corporeal investment, is therefore linked to the human face, the catalyst of expression par excellence, especially when presented as a close-up: as a mosaic for expression it is the perfect combination of 'relative immobility' with 'receptive organs'.[102] Deleuze equates the face with the close-up and explains that both are contingent in relation to the affection-image. This is particularly relevant to this project because, as Deleuze goes

[100] Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze on Cinema* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 38-39.
[101] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. by Hugh Tomnlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: The Athlone Press, 1997), p. 66.
[102] Ibid. This follows Bergson's understanding of affection, which involves 'a motor effort on an immobilised receptive plate' or 'a motor tendency on a sensitive nerve' (pp. 66, 87).

on to theorise, the fact that the close-up zooms in on the face does not necessarily derive from a perception of the face as partial, but it does, to a certain extent, objectify it.[103] As Ronald Bogue has explained:

> The face in close-up is an autonomous object, an immobile surface with motor tendencies. Once removed from social codes and the commonsense coordinates of space and time, the face becomes an affection-image: an image expressing an affective quality or power.[104]

Deleuze would probably disagree with this claim and explain that the face in cinema is already potentially an affection-image in and of itself, but what is interesting here is that Bogue understands the close-up as bringing about a process of abstraction whereby the face sheds its spatio-temporal coordinates and becomes both an object and pure affect. Simultaneously, the close-up, which can also be used to emphasise feelings of disgust or revulsion, has a transcendent effect.[105] Deleuze, basing his ideas on Pierce's notion of 'firstness', argues that the affection gathered through the close-up/face is one where the possible is given an expression without it necessarily being properly actualised.[106] The possibility of being outside of oneself, of subjectivity standing for and filling in the details, ensures that affect works psychosomatically. In bodily horror the use of the close-up aims to achieve a similar type of effect, but it tends to centre on the wound, particularly the body part/organ in the process of mutilation.

Deleuze himself already linked the concept of the affection-image to what he perceives as a certain use of facial nihilism in directors like Bergman, and which leads

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[103] Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, p. 95.
[104] Bogue, *Deleuze on Cinema*, p. 78.
[105] Julian Hanich, 'Dis/Liking Disgust: The Revulsion Experience at the Movies', *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 7 (2009), 293-309 (p. 294).
[106] Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, p. 98.

him to conclude that 'the facial close-up is both the face and its effacement', 'the fear of the face confronted with its nothingness'.[107] It is this 'effacement of faces into nothingness' that for him stand as the limit of affect and the affection-image.[108] Similarly, in the process of consuming bodily horror, the annihilation of the body necessarily brings about the ultimate feeling of affect, for organic matter is all. The affection-image becomes the close-up of the mutilated body, de-objectified and therefore potentially ours. In the process of disappearance we watch our own organicity and take solace in the comfort that we are still moving and being moved, still being affected. The limit of bodily horror is paradoxically that which is rarely reached immediately: death. This is why torture takes central stage. Death is the coming of nothingness, but affect can only occur where a sentient surface will respond. It is logical that suffering takes its place as the horrific motive par excellence in post-millennial horror, as I will show, and this is connected to a new perception of life as eminently corporeal.

Horror's Body without Organs

The shift towards an affective cinema I have been tracing has been anticipated by other subgenres of contemporary film. For example, a certain strand of hyper-violent 1990s cinema, 'the new brutality film', has been praised for its 'attempt to renegotiate and reanimate the immediacy and affective qualities of the cinematic experience within commercial Hollywood'.[109] But post-millennial horror has consciously championed affect as its main cinematic premise and turned it into a blown-out

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[107] Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, p. 100.
[108] Ibid., p. 101.
[109] Paul Gormley, *The New-Brutality Film: Race and Affect in Contemporary Hollywood Cinema* (Bristol and Portland: Intellect, 2005), p. 8.

mainstream spectatorial experience that also happens to be extremely successful. From the fast editing of the *Saw* franchise or *28 Days Later* (Danny Boyle, 2002), to the popularity of the moving hand-held camera, postmillennial horror, particularly torture porn, seems bent on creating a direct, affective experience based on intense images. This is not to imply that ideas themselves cannot be horrific (the premise of *Hostel* is as disturbing as its most graphic scenes), but the resurgence of three-dimensional horror since *My Bloody Valentine 3D* (Patrick Lussier, 2009), a marketing move that previously failed to attract the attention of viewers in the 1930s, would seem to indicate that the experience of horror is now one of full-bodied affect. *Saw 3D* (Kevin Greutert, 2010), the last in horror's most profitable franchise of all time, opens with a scene where a girl's intestines are projected towards the spectator. It is important to note that this emphasis on the production of as affective a filmic experience as possible does not necessarily entail an exponential increase in the number of gory scenes. In fact, according to recent studies in the amount of blood and gore in horror since 1997, the opposite might be true.[110] Instead, it would seem that what is seen is shown more realistically through the use of advanced cinematic techniques (CGI) or convincing prosthetics. Even films generally perceived to be contemporary examples of the 'suggestive' horror that has tended to gain critical praise, employ affect to create corporeal reactions in their spectators. *Paranormal Activity* (Oren Peli, 2007), for instance, uses the startle effect through the alternation of periods of silence and loud bangs or shrill piercing noises, and in the one scene which, in promotional videos of the film, caused audiences literally to jump from their seats, a body is fired at the camera.

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[110] Blair Davis and Kial Natale, '"The Pound of Flesh Which I Demand": American Horror Cinema, Gore, and the Box Office, 1998-2007', in *American Horror Film: The Genre at the Turn of the Millennium*, ed. by Steffen Hantke (Jackson, MI: The University Press of Mississippi, 2010), pp. 35-57.

Postmillennial horror, through its exploitation of extreme affect and its emphasis on ultra-violence visited upon the body, reveals the organicity inherent in us, or what Deleuze and Guattari, after Artaud, have called the body-without-organs (hereafter BwO), or 'the pre-subjective state of materiality' that makes sensations accessible.[111] The BwO is revealed in the temporary moment in which subjectivity is reintegrated into the body through the loss of the socius and the incorporation of the material body.[112] Such a moment of organicity is soon left behind when the rest of the body catches up. If it did not, we would lose all sense of social cohesion. This entails a conceptualisation of the body as 'intensive' and as 'opposed to the organization of organs we call an organism'.[113] This is perhaps the main reason why psychoanalysis' notion of the 'real' is left behind in favour of the hidden bodily structures that are seen as the key to understanding the human subject. Whilst the BwO is also located beyond the symbolic, as is the Lacanian 'real', and is therefore outside language, it is not conceived as 'the impossible' or as a traumatic missed encounter with an object of anxiety.[114] In fact, since it is linked to the experience of pain as something that re-connects us to our bodies, the BwO relies, to a certain extent, on its potential for occurrence and on its immanent qualities. It is thus that postmillennial horror can render the 'original unity of the senses' visible, and brings us in contact with the materiality of the BwO, that is 'with the intensive fact of the body'.[115] This process of

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[111] Kennedy, *Deleuze and Cinema*, p. 113.

[112] Although the socius is a term Deleuze and Guattari develop, it is best defined through phenomenology as the social processes of 'habituation and/institutionalisation' through which 'the phenomena of existence are usually either lived as simply given and taken for granted, or they [are] abstracted and reified objectively as the predicated constructs of what has come to be thought of as scientific enquiry'. See Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye*, p. 28

[113] Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, trans. by Daniel W. Smith (London and New York: 2010), p. 32. 'Organism' is here understood as the structure that imprisons organs at a biological level, but is easily extrapolated to the social organism(s) that regulates our bodies. See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 167.

[114] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Hogarth Press and Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1977), pp. 167, 55.

[115] Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, pp. 30-3.

uncovering necessarily starts with a dismantling of the self and the refusal of the organism as an organising system. As a manifestation of what Deleuze and Guattari describe as the 'becoming-animal essential to masochism', or the masochist's use of 'suffering as a way of constituting a body without organs and bringing forth a plane of consistency and desire', we could see the experience of the human being stripped down to meat in torture porn as that moment in which the BwO is constructed out of the experience of vicarious suffering and its concomitant affect.[116] If desire and pleasure are crucial to the BwO and, as we have determined, there is a certain scopophilic and masochistic pleasure in rediscovering the materiality of our bodies through images or descriptions of mutilation, these must be understood as potentialities. When our bodies are stripped down to the BwO, what strikes us is not their consistency or even the realisation of the ontological change thereby awakened, but rather the intensity of their immediacy: their potential for a change that, albeit only momentarily, requires a corporeal transvaluation. Postmillennial horror, in its insistence that 'the only object of terror is the body', enforces a process of subjectification whereby the body as meat is first apprehended – ratiocinated organically through somatic empathy – and ultimately expelled.[117]

It is important to remember that the BwO is not a physical body, but rather an abstract concept, a zone of 'becomings' opposed to the phenomenologists' lived-in body.[118] It is in that respect that we need to understand the BwO of horror as a potentiality: we are never truly reduced to meat; rather, we are simply apprehending the potentiality of the 'body as meat'. The creation of alignment between the bodies brings about a moment of organic recognition that can go beyond the usual

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[116] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p, 172.
[117] Crane, *Terror and Everyday Life*, p. 9.
[118] Kennedy, *Deleuze and Cinema*, p. 99.

understanding that what we are watching is not real. If only for a moment, the immanence of the body-as-meat is capable of bringing us back to a perception of our own bodies as organic, sentient and intensive. This state could be seen as the ground of the pre-symbolic, but, according to affect theory, the body becomes more of a Spinozoist 'composite, machinic, technological term, dissolved from any formulaic interpretation based upon biological terms' and 'disinvested of any physical fantasies'.[119] Glimpsing the BwO implicit in the mutilation of filmic bodies brings about this rethinking of our organic quality, one that is not entirely coextensive with the psychoanalytic paths proposed by Creed or the cognitive processes championed by Carroll. Horror's BwO putd us in contact with that intensive part of ourselves which is generally ignored because it is natural (i.e. biological) but socially moulded. Watching horror is an experience that can bring us closer to the limits of sentience, of sensorial liminality, of what it means to be in a state of 'becoming meat'.

Such is, in general, the experience of postmillennial horror. Zombies have speeded up and become the product of various body viruses that would seem to set them apart from the supernatural and project them into the hyperactivated affective reality of the twenty-first century. Films like *Cloverfield* (Matt Reeves, 2008) are filmed using steady cams that only emphasise the integral connection between spectator and victim that horror instigates. Even the possession film has turned its demons into evil spirits that ravage and defile the body in films like *REC 2* (Balagueró and Plaza, 2009). Other countries, like France, not usually known for their visceral cinema, have exploited violence and blood in horror films like *Inside/À l'intérieur* (Alexandre Bustillo and Julien Maury, 2007) or *Martyrs* (Pascal Laugier, 2008), something that has garnered them the appellation 'New French Extremity'. Most

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[119] Ibid., p. 98.

importantly, torture porn, the most successful subgenre of the decade, has offered its viewers copious servings of systematic mutilation and torture that have culminated in the projected horrors of a whole new set of films aiming to affect the viewer three-dimensionally. One of the promotional trailers for *Saw 3D* shows a typical cinema audience being trapped by their own seats as saws, a harpooned-vehicle and a pig-masked individual lunge towards them. The caption 'Will you survive until the end?' appears on-screen as a lugubrious voice announces that 'the last piece of the puzzle is you'. The experience of postmillennial horror announces itself as a form of challenge at a remove from the more subtle workings of psychoanalysis: these films will affect you, whether you like it or not.

Section 4. Philosophical Implications of the Affective Corporeal Model

In their reliance on the affective corporeal model I have developed, the texts I discuss in this thesis all show an inherent awareness of what, for lack of a better word, I must call a carnal reaction to existential nihilism: 'carnihilism'. This section explores how affect through fictional mutilation connects the material reality of being a body to a particular post-Shaviran and post-Deleuzian notion of irreducible organicity or extreme materialism that leads to the impossibility of understanding human existence outside the carnal remit. The affective corporeal model understands the body as the be-all and end-all of experience and therefore contemporary horror is inherently linked to it through its investment in mutilation and death. So where does affect begin in the horror film? As I move on to show, a very radical form of nihilism arises out of the extreme embodiment I have thus far explored. I focus on the work of Camus and Critchley in what follows because they both understand nihilism not as a disease to be superseded, but as a form of understanding existence that grants the human its bodily sphere. As such, I base my development of the nihilistic bent of contemporary horror on some of their ideas surrounding the nature of being and its relation to the world. The other half of this section seeks to contextualise the communal or shared aspects of the affective corporeal model by exploring its possible social function – I read the experience of watching bodily horror as a ritual centred on the enjoyment of mutilation – and by considering somatic interconnections through the notion of the dys-appearing body. Together, these various subsections complement my reading of bodily horror, contextualise the various philosophical implications that the fictional encounter with viscerality has on spectatorial ontology, and assess its reliance on ordinary life through a study of how the affective corporeal replicates model pain.

'Carnihilism'

> 'Meat is the state of the body in which flesh and bone confront each other locally
>
> rather than being composed structurally'.[120]

One of the characters in Dennis Cooper's novel *Frisk* (1992) makes a very post-

Nietzschean claim to Pierre, a hustler, as he tries to convince him that it would be the

ultimate act of intimacy to let his body be dissected. He goes on to confess the view of

life which supports such a corporeal understanding of love: 'I know there is no God.

People are only their bodies'.[121] Similarly, it would seem that bodily horror

understands its ontological positioning as one where the soul has become obsolete and

the body moves from being nothing to everything: matter, the solipsistic body trapped

in its own empirical reality, becomes the limit of perception. Carroll, in his conclusion

to *The Philosophy of Horror*, acknowledges what concerns me here: the connection

between this contemporary understanding of existence and the relevance of graphic

violence to contemporary horror. If his book predates my selection of material by up

to twenty years, Carroll already notes in 1990 the

> extreme gross fury visited upon the human body as it is burst, blown up,
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> broken, and ripped apart; as it disintegrates and metamorphoses; as it is
>
> dismembered and dissected; as it is devoured from the inside out. And, of
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> course, the last decade [the 1980s] has seen the perfection of what is called the
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> *splatter film*, and, in literature, what Peter Haining, the most prolific living

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[120] Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, trans. by Daniel W. Smith (London and New York: Continuum, 2010), p. 16.
[121] Dennis Cooper, *Frisk* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1992), pp. 69-70.

horror anthologist, calls (disapprovingly and perhaps, in some cases, uncharitably) 'butcher shop horror'.[122]

He connects this advent to the then-popular Clive Barker and his particular strand of body horror analysed in my introduction and which he links to gore.[123] This, Carroll offers, marks the start of the reduction of the subject to mere meat, what he calls the 'person-as-meat', and can be traced historico-politically to the collapse of the *Pax Americana* and the chaos of modern society.[124] Likewise, the 'person-as-meat' signifies a change in our understanding of ontology and a marked leap towards existential nihilism. According to Carroll, we are witnessing the decay of individualism as fostered by the 1960s, and what we have left is a 'sense of loss' and vulnerability; the realisation that the dream of individualism only lives in the realm of nostalgia.[125] Similarly, Shaviro's line of thought points to the fact that horror films may allow us to see what is not normally visible, and that through hyperreal violence we are put in contact with our visceral 'mysterious and impenetrable interiority'.[126] This leads to my conclusion in this chapter: spectators rejoice in the titillating spectacle of 'sensationalistic excess', the 'evanescent' yet 'drawn-out' moment, of the body becoming meat.[127] It is important to stress that this instant is premised on the body before it turns into dead matter, for as the *Saw* series makes quite clear, bodies 'do not matter' as soon as they stop suffering. So what are the implications of understanding the body as matter that feels?

If, as has been noted before, part of the aim of this project is to reach out for a structural, analytic and definitional apparatus that will not be binaric in essence (i.e.

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[122] Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, p. 211.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid., pp. 211-12.
[125] Ibid., p. 213.
[126] Shaviro, *Cinematic Body*, p. 100.
[127] Ibid.

divided into smaller constituents but still part of a dismembered whole) our understanding of nihilism also needs to undergo an important process of critical transvaluation. Nihilism has too often been pathologised and theorised as a detrimental philosophy that denounces a paranoid state of division, 'a split between thinking and feeling', grounded on self-rejection and resignation to a loveless life.[128] Unsurprisingly, perhaps, such ideas often come from heavily psychoanalytic corners that perceive nihilism as a syndrome or an illness to be overcome, an indicator of defeat.[129] In fact, most writers who have been loosely labelled nihilistic have tended to write against 'nihilism' as a passive form of acceptance. Camus's nihilism, for example, is grounded in an awareness of death that is not necessarily linked to a dysthymic acceptance of existence as akin to consensual damnation. Rather, as Wood has put it, death 'only becomes a problem for those religious believers who see life as something more than material existence'.[130] According to Camus, such a nihilistic adherence to what he terms 'an ethic of lucidity' in despair is grounded on a fierce rejection of metaphysics and an embrace of the 'divorce between man and his life' in 'absurdity'.[131] The absurd man understands the uselessness of suffering and the lack of a universal or an individual telos, and therefore lives by the following truism: 'life is not worth living'.[132] However, the very axiomatic nature of this statement, coupled with the biologic fact that the body naturally shies away from annihilation, leads the absurd man to refuse his only logically conclusive end: suicide.[133] Fictional death may

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[128] Karl M. Abenheimer, *Narcissism, Nihilism, Simplicity and Self*, ed. by Robert R. Calder (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1991), pp. 107, 109.

[129] Ibid. Abenheimer is thinking of German writers like Musil or Mann, as well as philosophers like Nietzsche, but it is clear from his argument that the average intellectual nihilist is necessarily prejudiced, loveless, self-aggrandising, lacks feeling, antisocial and only occasionally romantic.

[130] James Wood, *Introduction*, in Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. xi.

[131] Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, pp. 114, 10, 13.

[132] Ibid., p. 15

[133] Camus is often accused of advocating suicide when he clearly states in *Sisyphus* that he understands this type of self-sacrifice as an acceptance of defeat or 'repudiation', and that what the absurd man does is revolt against it through upholding the truth of death (pp. 54-5).

therefore be conjured up as 'a revolt of the flesh' through which death is not evacuated from the socius, but rather restaged and fully apprehended. Camus goes on to argue that 'there is no experience of death', not just because we live in ignorance of its implacability (i.e. we socially condemn it to semiotic exile) but also, and rather more obviously, because

> properly speaking, nothing has been experienced but what has been lived and made conscious. Here, it is barely possible to speak of the experience of others' deaths. It is a substitute, an illusion, and it never quite convinces us. That melancholy convention cannot be persuasive. The horror comes in reality from the mathematical aspect of the event.[134]

This mathematical aspect is the clear empiricist reality of the corpse: it does not move, it is not alive but has already started decomposing and becoming other than life. Such an acceptance brings about a conceptual shift where 'total absence of hope' stops equating with 'despair', where 'continual rejection' is no longer synonymous with 'renunciation', and 'conscious dissatisfaction' has little in common with 'immature unrest'.[135] The confession of 'impotence' leads to a paradoxical situation where the subject can find meaning in its absence.[136] Sinning in a godless world leads to enjoyment through 'feeling', to the point where lucidity in despair meets intelligence, and 'torture' becomes a 'victory' through a thorough refusal of the eternal and immaterial. The absurd man relies uniquely on his courage, his reasoning and, most importantly, his flesh.[137] This modern man, which Camus differentiates from classical man in his obsession with metaphysical problems, is in a constant state of search for

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[134] Ibid., p. 21.
[135] Ibid., pp. 34-6.
[136] Ibid., p. 44.
[137] Ibid., pp. 62-3, 64, 81, 109.

what he identifies as a carnal truth which allows him to 'create without appeal' to extraterrestrial or phantasmatic phenomena.[138] Carnal nihilism or 'carnihilism', the philosophy of such a modern man, may thus be understood as a virulent form of nihilism that is being played out in contemporary horror and which builds on Camus' ideas. Carnihilism believes there is nothing beyond perception and affect and their interconnection. There is no outside of the body because the body is the brain, and the brain is the body. Hence the ultimate moment of horror must be created around the idea of corporeal mutilation, since it attacks the last bastion of absolute ontological certainty.

This species of nihilism is not exclusive to literature and film. Philosophers like Simon Critchley claim that modern philosophy has been permeated by a type of atheism which, contrary to common assumptions, has not merely constituted a rejection of Christian morals and corresponding notions of spiritual transcendence, but has also entailed a preoccupation with the consequences of such a rejection, namely the search for meaning after 'religious disappointment'.[139] For Critchley, nihilism need not be overcome, but rather the 'desire to overcome' itself. He envisages a critical position from which Nietzschian ideas become feasible: 'eternal return [...] simply as that thought which enables one to endure the world of becoming without resenting it or seeking to construct some hinter-world'.[140] Carnihilism thus delineates itself through the affective corporeal model proposed by this thesis, where:

> [w]hat will be at stake is a luminal experience, a deconstructive experience of
> the limit – deconstruction as an experience of the limit – that separates the

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[138] Ibid., pp. 95, 93.
[139] Simon Critchley, *Very Little... Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy, Literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 8, 3, 2.
[140] Ibid., p. 9.

inside from the outside of nihilism and which forbids us both the gesture of transgression and restoration'. [141]

Critchley's is a positive affirmation of meaning in human finitude, 'the limitedness of the human condition', through a refusal to subscribe to compelling, and often contradictory, narratives of religious or political redemption.[142] Such a theoretical move entails the beginning of what he calls 'atheist transcendence', 'the neutral alterity of the *il y a*, the primal scene of emptiness, absence and disaster', that opens up 'in the relation to the alterity of death, of my dying and the other's dying' and which he opposes to the Judeo-Christian 'transcendence of the Good beyond Being or the trace of God'.[143] His pithy, succinct summary of this idea goes as follows:

> We are mortals, you and I. There is only my dying and your dying and nothing beyond. You will die and there is nothing beyond. I shall slowly disappear until my heart stops its soft padding against the lining of my chest. Until then, the drive to speak continues, incessantly. Until then, we carry on. After that there is nothing.[144]

In a manner, his is a return to Nietszche's anti-metaphysics: a belief 'in the "reality" and the sheer physicality of *natural* existence, a belief in the profundity of the natural and a belief in the sheer contingency of the natural'.[145] Thus for him, and for this study, there is no state of transcendence, to which we all aspire. This, as Kennedy points out, involves a logical acceptance of the cruelty of life and its transient quality.[146] Carnihilism can be seen, as I will go on to prove in the next section, as a

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[141] Ibid., pp. 12, 25, 27.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Ibid., p. 82-3, 179.
[144] Ibid., p. 83.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Kennedy, *Deleuze and Cinema*, p. 87.

certain type of transcendence of the body through the body. But before I take this philosophical line of thought one step further, it is important to emphasise that Crichtley and Camus insist on the body as hermeneutically constructed. The nihilism in contemporary horror puts us in contact with the 'other' body in us, and in that respect, it can be seen as conducive to a moment of enlightenment rather than one of defeat. Carnihilism is the search for a complex understanding of subjectivity through the mutilated body.

Bataille and Corporeal Anti-Transcendence

'In his strange myths, in his cruel rites, man is in search of a lost intimacy from the first'.[147]

I have described carnihilism as the ontological status characteristic of the secular West and as one which is best epitomised through the consumption of explicit and realistic violence typical of contemporary bodily horror. Its pinnacle is the moment where the physical body becomes aligned with the mutilated fictional body, through which it experiences what we could define as an excess of feeling. This is a cathartic moment different from identification and which is based around notions of the emptying out of the subject as it is socially constructed but which imbues the individual with embodied subjectivity. In other words, it exposes a moment of carnal realisation outside the socius. If I am to dwell further on the implications of this 'carnal' turn as revealed through pain in the next section, it is imperative that I tease out what I am

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[147] Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: Volume I*, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1991), p. 57.

understanding as the concomitant process of anti-transcendence inherent in carnihilism. As I see it, the moment of alignment between the two bodies, the spectator's and the violated, terrorised body on the screen allows for a certain release which has been theorised, albeit in a different context, by Georges Bataille. The consumption of filmic mutilation can be seen as a moment of ritualistic acceptance of death and of bodily anti-transcendence that develops from carnihilism.

According to Bataille, if humans are discontinuous beings in essence, death brings about the ultimate moment of continuity, of a return to existence. It is important to note that Bataille understands human life as one example, albeit of no major consequence, of existence itself, which is self-sufficient and continuous through its own investment in excessive production.[148] This moment of continuity is also experienced in the moment of reproduction, whether asexual or otherwise, but mainly belongs in the realm of death. Death is also paradoxically the moment where the human being realises its own discontinuity, for as Bataille succinctly puts it, 'if you die, it is not my death'.[149] If we understand life in these terms, we can see in love and reproduction a human need to look in the other for that lost continuity of creation, for a supersession of the discontinuous being.[150] Equally, if we understand death as the moment where continuity is laid bare, through a return to an existence which is otherwise left untouched by the death of the individual, sacrifice and other rituals of death stage and help overcome this ultimate crisis of being understood as an interplay between life and death. This is necessary because human life is organised according to one determining factor: the repudiation of 'carnal animality', partly through the

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[148] Bataille, *Eroticism*, p. 13.

[149] Ibid., pp. 13-15.

[150] This is, needless to say, a lost battle, since we cannot escape the discontinuity of being permanently and, in death, we experience the desolation of isolation most fatally and totally. Paradoxically, this is the only true moment, eroticism aside, where discontinuity is completely overcome in the total annihilation of the discontinuous being (p. 15).

principle of work, but mainly through the taboos surrounding death and sexuality.[151] Human existence is composed of moments where we try to slip away from the inherent animality in us: we create taboos around sex to constrain it and give it a surplus artificial value and we shun images of death and decomposition. The consumption of mutilation, as I am envisaging it, short-circuits this process of moral repression and allows for contact with that carnal animality: '[it] share[s] our horror of the life of the flesh, of life naked, undisguised, a horror without which we would resemble the animals'.[152] This horrific process of rediscovering our flesh, the affective corporeal mode activated through mutilation, is not, however, entirely devoid of extra-corporeality: we seek an organic reinstitution through its enactment. It is loathing of death and the mutilated body that ultimately leads, as I have argued, to carnihilism, or to the acceptance of the nothingness of the void. This fear is inherently human and is fought through the experience of 'fictional' sacrifice.

In this respect we can read the process of observing the mutilation of the fictional bodies of characters as organic or visceral reifications. The return to continuity (existence) is experienced as an epiphanic moment of revelation brought about by the assertion of individual discontinuity.[153] The spectator sees the moment of fictional sacrifice, which in the horror film is generally prefigured through the use of tropes (curiosity awakened, characters positioned in dangerous situations, etc.), as a moment of satisfied desire only retroactively. When gruesome eviscerations are over, the character is evacuated from the narrative and the story can resume. This has three implications. Firstly, the spectator is somehow involved in the fictional death for, even if unconsciously or purely as a result of wanting to know how the story develops, they

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[151] Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: Volumes II and III*, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1993), p. 56.
[152] Ibid., p. 63
[153] Bataille, *Eroticism*, p. 22.

desire the execution of potential victims.[154] Secondly, for this very same reason, the cinematic ritual does not affect the general continuity of existence (both in general and subjective terms) outside the filmic or narrative remit, although it may then have deeper implications for the spectator in the form of traumatic memories. Thirdly, partial mutilation, not death, generates corporeal affect, as the latter is premised on the cessation of the connection between living bodies. This idea will be developed in the following section.

The suggestion that watching corporeal transgression as a ritual of anti-transcendence which results in a return to the organicity of our bodies resonates in the work of Bataille. In fact, he himself compares sacrifice with fiction because they both allow humans to live deathly experiences vicariously (at a remove) and to obtain a certain pleasure from them. Bataille goes as far as to claim that literature has 'received sacrifice as a legacy' in its capacity to allow the reader to look at death in the face.[155] There is joy to be found in the fictitious loss of oneself in the illusory death of others. This moment of slippage is comparable to vertigo and leads to an awareness of the existential void I described in relation to Camus. The main problem with this theory is that we never totally share in the death of a fictional character, i.e. we do not kill the character (whether metaphorically or otherwise) and have mostly no control over the events unravelling in front of our eyes. However, through the decision of watching a film like *Saw*, which uses the promise of gore as one of its main selling points, consumers set themselves up for the consumption of a number of sequences that will portray the process of torture graphically. Also, as fans who are familiar with the workings of their favoured genre, they take part in the moment of viewing violence

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[154] Degrees of tolerance for, and interest in, the depiction of gore will obviously bring about the many different reactions between the viewer who decides to look away and the viewer who either looks out for those moments or decides to watch them in more detail.

[155] Bataille, *The Accursed Share: Volumes II and III*, p. 106.

almost ritualistically. This is to say that, although the process of consuming mutilation is markedly different from that of ritual sacrifice, its ultimate aim is not dissimilar, especially when connected to the emotional and bodily effects they have on spectators.

The experience of consuming images of intense mutilation as altruistic ritualistic sacrifice becomes a social action whereby death is reintegrated into existence, and continuity is regained through the violent death of the discontinuous individual.[156] In that respect, it is an eye-opening experience. It reveals what is normally expelled from the social body; it puts us in contact with pain and the transience of life. Most importantly, it brings death and decay closer to the field of ordinary experience through direct suggestion and alignment. Such a ritual allows for a freedom from constraints and taboos imposed on the body. It is a process whereby the flesh is revealed, and therefore, in essence, a prefiguration of Deleuze's body-without-organs.[157]

Witnessing death through ritualistic sacrifice allows for an acceptance and an overcoming of humanity's existential crux: 'the anguish of death'.[158] As Bataille argues, this death anxiety is sought after in certain contexts and to certain extents, and it may only be overcome temporarily.[159] The experience of the wilful consumption of images of death and violence would seem to re-enact such a scenario. Mutilation and, in its extreme case, death are consumed, pre-empted, envisaged, measured, experienced vicariously and ultimately expelled through a reinstitution of the social self. Ultimately, this is where this theoretical system proposes a critical sea change.

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[156] Bataille makes a similar point when he raises the point that sacrifice is in some way a process of 'restoring the *divine* order' in *The Accursed Share: Volume I*, p. 57.
[157] Bataille, *The Accursed Share: Volume I*, p. 58; Bataille, *Eroticism*, p. 92.
[158] Bataille, *Eroticism*, p. 87
[159] Ibid.

For Bataille death in ritual becomes 'a sign of life, a way into the infinite', because it is immersed in a world where there is a return to continuity.[160] The texts I analyse in this project, as well as the experience of their consumption are, as I have argued, imbued with the affective interplay between life and death. In them, there is no transcendence other than an organic one, that is, a return to matter or anti-transcendence. No afterlife is courted, for there is no belief in the spiritual. The carnihilism underlying postmillennial horror, as I will show in chapter three, announces the return to a godless continuity, a materialist one. Consuming affect and mutilation as a ritualistic moment of transcendence understands the subject as a conflation of both the social and the organic. But how is such transcendence actually achieved? And how is a rediscovery of the body possible? Discussions in the field of Pain Studies provide a tentative answer in their deployment of the workings of instances of corporeal affect that are akin to experiences of pain on the sentient body. Through the heightening of the singular moment of pain, the materiality of the spectatorial body is reintegrated physiologically.

Pain and The Dys-Appearing Body

> 'Physical pain has no voice, but when it at last finds a voice, it begins to tell a story'.[161]

As we have seen in the re-enactment of fictional sacrifice, or the death and mutilation of others, the spectatorial body can be seen to return to organic continuity. As I have

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[160] Ibid., p. 91
[161] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 3.

explained, according to Bataille, this moment is reached when we apprehend our carnality. The moment of horror is revealed through the acceptance of the repugnant animality that has been kept at bay and which contributes to the 'totality of being': we become human beings in totality only when this other side is reintegrated.[162] However, at the same time, it is the negation of this very same repugnant animality, because primordially corporeal, which helps us stay immersed in Deleuze's socius, or organised social body. It is by losing oneself in the process of staring at death through the consumption of mutilation that a total state of being can be accomplished, even if only temporarily. This idea becomes particularly relevant when considered alongside recent theories on the nature of pain, its language and, most importantly, its relation to the body. As this section will go on to show, it is through the experience of separate instances of pain that the body in its totality can be apprehended. If the textual or on-screen suffering encouraged by bodily horror is somehow transferrable onto the reader or spectator's body, this moment of physical transcendence hangs upon our general conception and perception of pain. Looking at the basic psychosomatic nature of the body in pain and its capacity to communicate itself outside of its own carnal inscription can help devise the theoretical implications of the fictional consumption of mutilation.

In her seminal study *The Body in Pain* (1985), Elaine Scarry lays down the basis for a theoretical consideration of pain and the tortured body. Scarry's argument is straightforward: the experience of pain is essentially a silent one, fraught with a more basic human limitation, the inexpressibility of being. Much as Bataille sees violence, in its final and destructive power dynamic, as having no language, for Scarry

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[162] Bataille, *The Accursed Share: Volumes II and III*, p. 118.

physical pain destroys language.[163] This is not only a consequence of pain's effect on speech – the very obvious premise being that when in deep pain all communication is suspended and transmogrifies into a language of sobs, wails and groans – but also of the fact that pain resists linguistic objectification. We are always hard-pressed to express exactly what it is that is hurting: at best we can describe its likeness to other feelings and sensations ('a burning feeling') or the effect that physical objects would have on the body ('pins and needles', 'it feels as if I am being sawn in half', etc.). Language is rendered useless when confronted with bursts of intense pain, and the capacity to transmit the intensity or quality of that pain relies on how effectively the actual feeling may be vicariously experienced by a second, external individual.

However, whilst the experience of being in pain is silent and hermetic, the experience of witnessing it can bring about a moment of ontological crisis. Scarry best epitomises this idea when she claims that 'to have great pain is to have certainty; to hear another person has pain is to have doubt'.[164] It is pain's inherent unsharability that can cause this existential chasm, for pain is a reminder of 'presentness', not just of pain itself but of our own human existence – we may forget we exist physically when we daydream, but pain anchors us to the carnal world. For the witness, on the other hand, who cannot feel this pain physically, doubt is the usual state of being. As Scarry notes, it is through the objectification of that pain that vicariousness and impact can be achieved.[165] This objectification can take place through two very different methods. The first one showcases the potential for damage that the simple image of the threatening object has through its referential quality. In cinematic terms, this

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[163] Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, p. 19.

[164] Ibid., p. 7. For the person in pain the experience of pain is '"effortlessly" grasped' (p. 4).

[165] Her example belongs to a very different social field altogether, since she focuses on Amnesty International's capacity to 'transfer' pain onto the body of the newsletter reader by exposing graphically the situation in countries with inferior human rights records (p. 9). The desire to instigate distress and, more particularly, pain is nevertheless a main feature of contemporary horror subgenres like the ones analysed in this project.

would be tantamount to a zoom-in on a knife, drill or any other weapon of torture in the *Hostel* films. The second involves the objectification of pain itself: the act of 'beginn[ing] to externalize, objectify, and make sharable what is originally an interior and unsharable experience'.[166] This process of 'de-objectifying' the work of pain by objectifying the body can only truly occur when a referential content is established in accordance with it. Scarry further elaborates that

> If the felt-attributes of pain are (through one means of verbal objectification or another) lifted into the visible world, *and if the referent for these now objectified attributes is understood to be the human body*, then the sentient fact of the person's suffering will become knowable to a second person.[167]

Bodily horror utilises this objectification of the body as a site of pain in its attempt to make that pain knowable and, to a certain extent, transferable. I have shown how affect is sought by these texts and how the moment of shared embodiment relies on the capacity to establish a connection between the spectatorial and fictional bodies. This is also in keeping with Scarry's understanding of the anthropomorphic quality of pain: the degree of transference of that pain, its actual effect on the viewer, will depend on its capacity to show the intradiegetic body, the victim's, as anthropomorphic. As soon as the body stops being recognisably human, there is also an end to sympathy or the possibility for vicarious feelings that might become transferable.

The type of pain I am concerned with is therefore obviously and necessarily imaginary, for the pain recreated in the reader/spectator's body can never be truly corporeal unless one is physically injured in the process. It is possible to consider

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[166] Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, p. 16.
[167] Ibid., p. 13. Italics in the original.

visual impact as a type of aggression on the body, but such an attack will necessarily remain confined to the limits of our imagination and capacity for sentience. This is particularly relevant when, as Scarry reminds us, the 'imaginary' and actual 'pain' represent extreme and radical experiential polarities: to imagine is to be as far removed from the world of real objects as is physically possible, whilst to be in pain is, as we will see in Leder's work, to be in direct contact with the act of being.[168] Thus the experience of imagining mutilation, however oxymoronic at first, will be one whereby what is effectively unreachable becomes objectified and therefore cognitively feasible. If fainting from hearing a particular short story or the feeling of disturbance is possible when watching *Hostel*, this is because that pain is consumed and somehow re-appropriated into the sentient body. Pain will therefore need to be apprehended before it can be corporeally shared; it would need to be objectified, that is given an exterior image, before it can be invested in bodily terms. Once the image of the torn body is visualised, the human body can apprehend the degree of damage inflicted onto that body and calculate its probable effect. If this is a successfully disturbing experience, the organic body will recoil. It is when pain can be objectified and externalised through art and entertainment that this damaged body is turned into an available experience. This is why pain can be seen, paradoxically, much like the texts studied in this thesis, as an empirical catalyst, because it puts viewers back in contact with the body as object. By making us aware of how the hidden organic body is brought back to the world of sensory immediacy, the body is parcelled into instances of pain that bring about the totality of being. This ontological completion is not accepted as part of a desired social existence and is therefore labeled and sold in

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[168] Ibid., pp. 168-69.

particular, measured and contained instances of recreational pain that act like the Bataillean ritual.

Pain scholar Drew Leder, following the work of Merleau-Ponty, describes the body as 'self-effacing'; its natural tendency is to recede, and this can lead, as he explains, to a situation where 'our organic basis can be easily forgotten due to the reticence of visceral processes'.[169] In order to function in the world, and particularly at a social level, the body self-effaces to the point where its organicity is only perceptible through moments of dysfunction. These moments are characterised by the process whereby the body becomes 'other' to itself and pain an agent working against wholesomeness. This means that to feel other than perfectly unaware of the body's organicity is to be dysfunctional. A perfect example of this is pain, which Leder sees as a 'sensory intensification', and which I am comparing to the effect of bodily horror on the spectator.[170] Its temporal and episodic nature make it work as an 'affective call' on the body which enacts a 'spatiotemporal constriction'.[171] In other words, it induces 'self-reflection' and 'isolation', and is confined within the limits of our flesh. [172] It pulls the body back to the here and now of the present. This immediacy, coupled with the alien quality of pain that I have discussed in previous sections, objectifies the body in pain, and it is at this remove from oneself that we may perceive the 'body in pain' as essentially different from the usual self.[173] The healthy body is normally self-effacing and its visceral quality disappears, but when the body senses localised pain it 'dys-appears', or surfaces through a dysfunctional feeling. The subsequent thematisation of the body in its dysfunctional state makes it re-appear, first in a

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[169] Drew Leder, *The Absent Body* (London and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 69.
[170] Ibid., pp. 70-71.
[171] Ibid., p. 74.
[172] Ibid., p. 76.
[173] Ibid., pp. 76-77.

localised manner ('my leg hurts') and then, more broadly, as a whole (we are put back in contact with the concealed side of the body, its organicity).[174] This dys-appearing body is dangerous because it threatens our sense of 'self', it puts the social body or the socius, at risk.[175] Hence it is perfectly legitimate to explain the experience of undergoing physical pain as one that nevertheless has an effect on the concept of being in the world. Leder calls this process of ontological awareness a 'corporeal hermeneutics'.[176]

Bodily horror works as a catalyst of the experience of simulated pain through the consumption of mutilation, which activates a process of bodily awareness. Spectators may hiss or touch their own feet when faced with a foot-amputation scene like the one in *Saw*, because the on-screen body is perceived as somehow contiguous or recognisable. The vicarious consumption of those images and their effect mirrors the awakening of pain. Leder's dys-appearing body, fictional pain as transmutable through fiction, becomes a way into our own sense of subjectivity because it allows us to be in touch with our visceral side. Pain Studies, and its understanding of suffering as an experience which has ontological value, informs in my theorisation of the possible effect of affective corporeal transgression: the fictional body affects the fleshly body of the spectator through a simulation of mutilation that is processed in the manner that physical pain would be. Through this moment of self-inflicted dys-function attained through the consumption of mutilation, the organic body is disclosed both in parts and as a whole. By acknowledging the organic part of ourselves, we acknowledge our bodies and their materiality. But, as with pain, such a moment of awareness is transitory and ultimately, unless the viewer is traumatised, transient. In

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[174] Ibid., p. 86.
[175] Ibid., p. 93.
[176] Ibid.

the same way that the body in pain seeks relief so as to be able to function normatively again, so the spectatorial body seeks to go back to its original state and conceal its viscerality.

I have theorised the instance of corporeal affective transgression as a form of secular somatic empathy caused by the recognition of the effect and extent of pain in ordinary life. Such a theoretical move reads the experience of watching mutilation as an encounter with the BwO. The ritualistic consumption of the transgressed body in extreme examples of contemporary horror has remained the basis of this experience. I have done little, so far, to explore the origins of the connection between affect and corporeal transgression. To this end, as I explained in the introduction, I now proceed to connect affective corporeal transgression, not to the Gothic novel or the tale of terror, but to drama and the spectatorial impact created through the staging of mutilation. Whilst the literary shapings of the horrific imaginary constitute a landmark that inflects the direction of affect in horror, it is important to understand that the creation of a strong corporeal awareness in the audience is one of the *raisons d'être* of theatre. Cinema shares such a desire, but it is necessary to explore the origins of affective corporeal transgression first in order appropriately to assess its role in the contemporary affective spectacles of horror film. The next chapter thus charts a tentative genealogy of affect as it travels from the cathartic theatres of Greek tragedy, through to the visually explicit types of visceral and affective stages of the grand guignol, the Gothic play, and Artaud's 'cruel' pieces. This journey understands affect as morphing and adapting the visibility and use of corporeal transgression to particular staging practices and historical cinematic situations. Somatic empathy through pain has long been articulated in drama, but it has been in those traditions generally associated with terror, fear, bloodshed and cruelty where it has made itself felt most

intensely. The shift from stage to cinema theatre seems logical and is supported by the capacity of the moving image to bring corporeal transgression to new and different affective contexts. In a sense, I argue, the viscerality of contemporary horror cannot be fully understood without a prior consideration of the construction of viscerality in performance.

CHAPTER 2. Dramatic Affect: The Staging of Corporeal Transgression

In order to analyse the current socio-political and cultural implications of corporeal transgression, it is necessary first to trace its emergence back to an artistic tradition that has used the semiotics of the dismembered body for similar affective purposes. In fact, a case study of bodily horror can only be attempted once this legacy of depictions of mutilation has been examined through a critical lens that engages them with the affect theory that preoccupied the first part of this study. The earlier texts in this chapter are relevant because they show how the exploitation of violence means to throw the viewer/audience into the jolts of a corporeal self-awareness much like the BwO. In this respect, this section centres on the origins of horror in Western theatre because it is arguably the most obvious example of a mainstream fictional, yet affective, type of entertainment. Throughout this chapter, I focus on relevant plays and stage performances which have consciously used extreme violence and discuss them as part of an affective continuum that culminates in torture porn and faux snuff. This section is therefore deeply imbued in the affective capacity of theatre as a genre, but also in the possible limitations of the performance of extreme violence. After the discussion of the first instances of terror on stage and their link to a cathartic form of affect, I turn to the Gothic stage for a connecting thread that binds the excesses of Jacobean tragedy, *Titus Andronicus* in particular, to the ruined and lugubrious settings of the Gothic imagination and its pyrotechnical displays. The last two sections of this chapter turn to France for two types of theatre that made a very specific connection between affect and drama: the grand guignol and the theatre of cruelty.

Section 1. Early On-Stage Mutilation

The Tragic Form and the Use-Value of Suffering

'You are an amazing man, truly amazing, and you go to amazing sufferings'.[1]

'Pain is the very stuff of tragic drama', write James Robert Allard and Matthew R. Martin in a recent collection on the use of violence in British theatre.[2] This is not only true of tragedy, since the human obsession with the representation of violence, death and the mutilated body is as ancient as the first artistic records kept by Western civilisations.[3] The cave drawings of the Palaeolithic era that so fascinated philosophers like Georges Bataille necessarily testify to a fascination with the process of death-in-the-making that I have identified in the previous chapter. In fact, ritualistic representations of hunting practices may be seen, in part, as visual explorations of corporeal limits. This need to portray the injured body, particularly in battle, can be traced back in literature to epic poems such as Homer's *Iliad* (eighth century BC) and Virgil's *The Aeneid* (29-19 BC), and their overarching thematic concerns surrounding the nature of war. Descriptions of maimed bodies also abound in the Anglo-Saxon tradition in *Beowulf* (eighth to eleventh century AD). However, if the depiction of mutilation is frequent in the epic genre, it is only with the development of Greek tragedy and, as Nietzsche put it, its particular 'sensitivity' to pain, that suffering finds a perfect arena for the exploration of the relations between corporeal transgression,

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[1] Euripides, *Bacchae*, in Bacchae *and Other Plays*, ed. by James Morwood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 972-3, p. 72. Further references will be given parenthetically.

[2] *Staging Pain, 1580-1800: Violence and Trauma in British Theater*, ed. by James Robert Allard and Mathew R. Martin (Burlington and Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), p. 1.

[3] See Philippe Ariès's influential *The Hour of Our Death*, trans. by Helen Weaver (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981).

performance and its affective consequences.[4] Plays like Euripides' *Bacchae* (405 BC) or Aeschylus' *The Eumenides* (458 BC) are evidence that drama has often shown itself to be a natural medium through which to explore such carnal negotiations.

If, as we have seen in Scarry's work, pain is essentially intransmutable, its corporeal isolation should make suffering essentially anti-dramatic. But, as Allard and Martin have pointed out, it is precisely within the capacity of theatre to 'transform[...] pain into pleasure and communicat[e] that pleasure from actor to audience'.[5] Whether it be perceived as providing pleasure in the recognition of a certain structure or logic or, more traditionally, as a cathartic form that purges repressed emotions by allowing for a release through fiction, affective responses are crucial to the classical conception of tragedy.[6] Scholars have actually emphasised the importance in tragedy of what is 'seen' as opposed to what is 'said', and have argued that attending a play in Ancient Greece was an 'intensely physical' and 'immediate [experience] rather than an intellectual [one]'.[7] This directness connects early manifestations of mutilation with the performative aspect essential to drama, not least because Athenian theatre had an inherently ritualistic side that blurred the line between participative audience and actors.[8] If we follow my development of the cinematic corporeal experience as inflected by sacrifice and ritual, the tragic genre becomes an evident precursor for what I have termed bodily horror. This can obviously only happen at a historical and methodological remove, for the means by which affect was achieved have transformed

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[4] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of the Tragedy*, in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 2000), p. 21.

[5] Allard and Martin, *Staging Pain*, pp. 2-3.

[6] See Stephen Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics* (London: Duckworth, 1986), p. 201; W. Hamilton Fyfe, *Aristotle's Art of Poetry: A Greek View of Poetry and Drama* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. xviii-xix.

[7] J. Michael Walton, *Tragedy Reviewed: The Greek Sense of Theatre* (London and New York: Methuen, 1984), pp. 3, 36, 35.

[8] J. R. Green, *Theatre in Ancient Greek Society* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 1994), pp. 8-9; Clifford Leech, *Tragedy* (London: Methuen, 1969), pp. 54-5.

and evolved to suit sensibilities and advances in technology that may render previous affective methods unconvincing or unrealistic. However, tragedy is still foundational to this study in its early preoccupation with the body-affect-spectator schemata, which I tease out in what follows.

As Jennifer Wallace explains, classical tragedy 'focus[es] upon the poignancy of the physical body which is suffering or about to suffer' in its creation of a type of pity different from sympathy.[9] In its Aristotelian conception, suffering is 'an action that involves destruction or pain (e.g. deaths in full view, extreme agony, woundings and so on)', and pity cohabits with a sense of enjoyment in relief that comes from the awareness that there is no actual physical threat to the audience.[10] This is compatible with my contemporary conception of cinematic corporeal affect: it does not deny vicariousness or even a sense of guilt in the uneasy complicity felt when watching the mutilation of an actor, yet it simultaneously acknowledges that the experience necessarily entails pleasure. Aristotelian pity and its relation to fear are partly premised on the capacity of drama to use violence as a form of catharsis, even if this does not always rely on actual on-stage mutilation. In fact, Aristotle explains that it is preferable for 'the evocation of fear and pity to result [...] from the structure of the events', rather than its circumventing 'spectacle', and that if the plot is rightly constructed, its simple telling will cause anyone who hears to 'shudder[...] and feel[...] pity at what happens'.[11] However, even this apparent rejection of the spectacle of violence is consistent with the fact that violence is crucial to the arousal of emotions. In fact, Aristotle goes on to link effect with affect when he remarks that plots should be worked out through body language and gestures. As he puts it, '[g]iven the same

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[9] Jennifer Wallace, *The Cambridge Introduction to Tragedy* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 30

[10] Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. by Malcolm Heath (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 19.

[11] Ibid., p. 22.

natural talent, those who are actually experiencing the emotions are the most convincing; someone who is distressed or angry acts out distress and irritation most authentically'.[12] Staged violence is not a marker of refinement, and therefore its affective import must be sought through acting and rhetorical techniques that allow for the concentration of pity. It is crucial that such pity be found in fear and not in the 'simply monstrous', which, as Aristotle tells us, has 'nothing to do with tragedy'.[13] For example, we are not shown Oedipus gouging his eyes out in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* (429 BC), and in his *Ajax* (450-430 BC) we never see how the hero falls 'on his sword and plung[es] it in his heart'.[14] That the actual spectacle of extreme violence is deliberately omitted distinguishes early affective art from later developments in dramatic corporeal affect and the on-stage mutilation of genres like the grand guignol, which are irredeemably characterised by their use of 'fear without pity'.[15] This consideration of visible violence constitutes a turning point in notions of spectatorial affect, for it signals the beginning of a sustained focus on violence as a driving force and the end of pity in its classical sense.

Greek tragedy is nevertheless essential to a nuanced understanding of the use of mutilation as part of the dramatic spectacle. If it largely shied away from the parading of on-stage graphic spectacles, we should not necessarily envisage Greek tragedy as quaint or feeble. According to horror playwright André de Lorde, Aeschylus' *The Eumenides* frightened his audience so much that 'women miscarried, children died, and many spectators were stricken with madness'.[16] In fact, Aristotelian conceptions of the genre see fear as crucial to the form. Terry Eagleton, for example,

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[12] Ibid., p. 28.
[13] Ibid., p. 22.
[14] Sophocles, *Electra and Other Plays*, trans. by David Raeburn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 89.
[15] Pierre Citti, 'Peur sans pitié', *Europa* 836 (1998), pp. 157-66, calls this new type of spectacle an aesthetic 'of the nerves' (p. 159, my translation).
[16] André de Lorde, *Théâtre de la Mort* (Paris: Eugène Figuière, 1928), p. 13. My translation.

explains that tragedy 'is supposed to have something fearful about it too, some horrific quality which shocks and stuns'.[17] It is this which turns it into an experience essentially 'traumatic' and 'sorrowful' but simultaneously 'cleansing, bracing and self-affirming'.[18] Cinematic affect shares with these early classic plays a concern with the attack on the body as a means to extract particular audience responses. Cinematic affect, particularly in horror film, can thus be seen as a cathartic experiment on spectatorial affect influenced by Aristotelian understandings of tragedy that avoid realistic violence. This is not to say that mutilation is totally absent from the stage. The lack of actual special effects in Athenian theatre would not have allowed for the technical accomplishment of bloodshed, but it is nevertheless present in many Greek tragedies. Euripides' *Bacchae* is perhaps the best example of an early play that already shows signs of all the characteristics I am assigning to corporeal affect in chapter three: 1) prefiguration, or announcement, of future violence, 2) an actual moment of extreme affect conveyed through mutilation, and 3) a self-reflexive attitude towards its consumption. I turn to the text now to expand and illustrate how violence may have worked affectively both through the telling of events and through restrained spectacle.

Euripides' play starts with a simple premise: Dionysus has descended to Earth to be praised in Thebes, where his cult is only reluctantly being adopted. King Pentheus is particularly fearful of the freedom bacchic rites allow women, so he challenges Dionysus in his human form. The play then revolves around the god's morbid revenge, which he exerts through Pentheus' mother, Agave, priestess of the bacchae. The tragic outcome of the flawed hero, whose name is 'fit to sorrow for' (508, p. 58), is prefigured early on through a messenger, whose role is purely to relate the superhuman danger the bacchae pose. He explains that, after successfully leaving

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[17] Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), p. 1.
[18] Ibid.

the bacchae behind, their fury was unleashed on a pack of cows grazing nearby with grisly results. Looking from the distance, the messenger sees one of them 'wrenching in two a full-uddered young heifer which bellowed, while others were rending, tearing mature ones apart' (738-40, p. 65). The description of this massacre is further elaborated by the play: 'ribs or a cloven hoof' are described as being 'flung up and down' (741) or 'hung under the fir trees dripping, all fouled with blood' (742), and Pentheus is told that the hides of bulls 'were torn apart quicker than [he] could have closed [his] royal eyes' (747-8). This detailed warning seems to have no effect on Pentheus whatsoever, and by the time he finds his bloody death, the violence has long been anticipated. For example, Dionysus foretells what is about to take place when he leaves Pentheus wearing 'the clothes which he shall take to the underworld when he goes there slaughtered at his mother's hands' (858-9, p. 69), and the chorus constantly exalts the importance of justice. This climactic moment, Pentheus' evisceration, is not seen, but retold in all its brutality. Both of Pentheus' arms are torn out by the bacchae without the use of weapons, who have been granted inordinate powers by Dionysus. Pentheus' limbs are then scattered around by the various women, '[o]ne of them carr[ying] an arm, another a foot still in its shoe' (1133-4, p. 76), and they even 'play[...] ball with Pentheus' flesh' (1136). The head is then picked up by the crazed Agave and carried around as a hunting trophy.

But if such a setup would appear excessive, Euripides makes a point of alerting the public that the use of violence is not gratuitous through the figure of the messenger. He tells the chorus that 'it is not proper [...] to exult over horrific deeds' (1039-40, p. 74). This would seem to indicate that explicit violence is only provided because it is conductive to the crucial feeling of pity. What is being precluded here is enjoyment without engagement: one may only exult in these deeds if they elicit a

moment of reflection. In this respect we can see how Greek tragedy, whilst not exploiting visual affect corporeally in exactly the same manner that torture porn does, becomes an important predecessor to the belief that on-stage violence may have a direct moral impact on the viewer. The same didactic dimension is exploited through the play's moment of extreme affect, which is, interestingly, particularly corporeal: Agave's realisation that the head she is brandishing is her son's. Agave's words, 'I see a sight that brings me infinite pain and misery' (1282, p. 80), would seem to indicate that the reaction expected from the public is one of commiseration and empathy. This line is often picked up by actors who sometimes perform this scene histrionically. Theodoros Terzopoulos' 1985 production, for example, shows a gaping and grotesque Agave, making full use of facial expression and a very heightened body language to convey self-awareness, pity and guilt. This attempt to create maximum affect is not exclusive to the twentieth century: a performance in 53 BC used the real head of the Roman general Marcus Licinus Crassus, defeated at Carrhae.[19] However, Euripides' is a type of affect steeped in pity and in a realisation of the extent of the atrocity committed. *Bacchae* exposes the connections between pity and violence precisely by providing a self-referential comment on its use of mutilation. When Dionysus asks Pentheus: '[a]re you no longer willing to be a spectator of the maenads?' (829, p. 67), particularly after the messenger has spoken of their destructive potential, the question is surely aimed at the audience as well. A classic Greek tragedy like *Bacchae* already points toward the beginnings of a self-aware exploitation of violence as release, since it is a text that can manage to play with violence whilst criticising its consumption.

This form of visceral tragedy was taken to new graphic extremes by a playwright who would greatly influence the revenge tragedies of the late sixteenth and

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[19] Euripides, *Bacchae*, p. 191, n. 1167.

early seventeenth centuries. More specifically, Seneca's exploitation of violence in plays like *Thyestes* (62 AD) would have a lasting impact on Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare. The almost infinite repertoire of corporeal calamities and torture to be found in revenge plays includes hangings and tongues bitten out (Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, 1587), poisoned skulls (Thomas Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy*, 1606), victims thrust into holes (Cyril Tourneur's *The Atheist's Tragedy*, 1609/1610), death by strangulation and stabbing (John Webster's *The White Devil*, c.1612), a scene where a corpse's hand is passed as the real husband's (Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, 1614), suicide by impalement (Middleton's *Women Beware Women*, 1613/14 or 1619/23), and even a murdering incestuous lover who parades his sister/lover's heart on a dagger (John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, 1630?).[20] The extent of the impact that these moments of mutilation would have had on their audiences is difficult to assess, for there are few accounts which explore the reception of specific instances of mutilation in early modern drama. However, there is one play that is particularly well-known for the affective responses its exploitation of corporeal transgression has evoked, particularly in recent years: William Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* (1588-93). I turn to it in the rest of this chapter because it provides a perfect example of how, by the seventeenth century, the main purpose of tragedy is to affect through the suffering of others. It is also a text that, through the success of postmillennial graphic adaptations, shows that corporeal affective transgression is transhistorical.

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[20] *Four Revenge Tragedies*, ed. by Katharine Eisaman Maus (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 27, 79, 140, 277; John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi and Other Plays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 83, 98-9, 163; Thomas Middleton, *Women Beware Women and Other Plays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 159, 161; John Ford, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore and Other Plays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 235.

Titus Andronicus: Affective Transgressed Bodies

'There's meed for meed, death for a deadly deed'.[21]

It is not a coincidence that the first English tragedy, Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton's *Gorboduc* (1561), was written in direct imitation of the brutal tragedies of Seneca. The term 'tragedy of blood', a categorical subgenre of classic tragedy, was coined in the Victorian era to deal with the problematically explicit content of plays like Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*.[22] As a text, the play is an extreme example of how the pejorative rhetoric that surrounds the recourse to extreme graphic scenes and references to mutilation can have an impact even on that most untouchable of literary figures. If the play has not been challenged solely on the basis of its gore, it is mostly its 'dreadful catalogue of horrors and atrocities' which has led reviewers and scholars to call it a 'sensation-shocker'.[23] A brief look at similarly violent and cruel plays like *King Lear* (1600), which Peter Brook recuperated at its most sadistic and pitiless for a performance in 1962, is enough to reveal such an idea as objectionable at best, and since the 1960s scholars have done much to redress this situation. But even then the violence has been reclaimed for its metaphorical or intertextual (Senecan and Ovidian) possibilities, and not for its affective quality. This line of thought has seen the restagings of *Titus* in the twentieth century as a metaphorical negotiation of crimes like those perpetrated by the Manson Family, Jeffrey Dahmer, Danny Rolling and

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[21] William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*, in *Titus Andronicus and Timon of Athens: Two Classical Plays*, ed. by Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), V.iii, 66. Further references are given in the text parenthetically. For stage directions, the page number is provided.

[22] G. K. Hunter, 'Shakespeare's Earliest Tragedies: *Titus Andronicus* and *Romeo and Juliet* (1974), in *Shakespeare's Early Tragedies: Richard III, Titus Andronicus, Romeo and Juliet*, ed. by Neil Taylor and Bryan Loughrey (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 113-26 (p. 113).

[23] 'A Review of Ira Aldridge's *Titus* at the Britannia, Huxton [1857]', in *Titus Andronicus: Critical Essays*, ed. by Philip C. Kolin (New York, NY: Garland Publishers, 1995), pp. 377-9 (p. 377); Carados, '*Titus* at the Old Vic, 1923', in *Titus Andronicus: Critical Essays*, pp. 381-3 (p. 381).

even O.J. Simpson, and, more generally, as reflecting the magnitude and goriness of political violence.[24] Not surprisingly, directors like Peter Stein in his 1989-1990 adaptation have made the conscious decision to translate the setting of the play to more obviously fascist eras like Nazi Germany. Others, like Deborah Warner in 1987, have even tried to universalise the violence by staging the play without any specific time or parameters. Such an emphasis on *Titus'* powerful political subtext has been incredibly productive to its life in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, but it has also highlighted how the fact it is a brilliantly affective text is not enough. The decisions of these modern directors would seem to suggest a search for a deeper meaning behind the affective space of mutilation that may help the play 'ris[e] apprehensibly' over its 'repulsive horror'.[25] The type of critical rhetoric that labels such perceptions of violence unnecessary, gratuitous or in need of a justification, and which has affected the reception of graphic productions of the play, also happens to echo a long history of horror film criticism. For example, Mark Gatiss's condemnation of post-1980s horror in the recent BBC series *A History of Horror* (2011) maintains the traditional view that has tended to praise the artistry of suggestive directors like Val Lewton and to censor the visual excesses of films like *Saw* or *Hostel*.[26]

Part of the reason why *Titus* is important to this project as a precursor to cinematic affective corporeal transgression is that the play has always been celebrated for its capacity to elicit a powerful response from the audience, even by its detractors. Jan Kott, who confessed to having re-read the play and thinking it 'ridiculous', found the text turned into 'a moving experience' when staged, and A. M. Witherspoon, who

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[24] Philip C. Kolin, '"Come Down and Welcome Me to This World's Light": *Titus Andronicus* and the Canons of Contemporary Violence', in *Titus Andronicus: Critical Essays*, pp. 305-16, (pp. 307-8, 315).
[25] Daniel Scuro, 'Titus Andronicus: A Crimson-Flushed Stage! [Titus in 1955]', in *Titus Andronicus: Critical Essays*, pp. 399-410 (p. 402).
[26] *A History of Horror with Mark Gatiss: The American Scream*, pres. Mark Gatiss, *BBC Four*, 19 June 2011. It is worth noting that Gatiss does not personally criticise torture porn, but he does condemn the slasher genre as a whole, which is a clear predecessor of this more recent phenomenon.

deemed Titus 'not a great tragedy', had to concede that it works very well with audiences.[27] The idea that *Titus* is a piece of 'thundering good theatre' capable of moving, thrilling, terrifying and dazzling audiences has persisted, especially after the 1955 Peter Brook adaptation.[28] In fact, the last fourteen years have seen at least three major and successful adaptations of the play – Julie Taymor's film *Titus* (1999), and two stage productions, Bill Alexander's in 2003 and Lucy Bailey's in 2006, none of which have, incidentally, felt the need to play down its affective mutilation.

To say that Titus has enormous affective potential is, of course, a bit of an understatement given its performance history. As Jonathan Bate has noted, the play's highly controversial scenes, particularly Lavinia's rape, rendered the play practically unstageable in previous centuries.[29] Textual fidelity could only be regained in the twentieth century, with its loosening of morals and changes in attitudes towards what is visually acceptable on stage. And then, when Robert Atkins decided to direct the play at the Old Vic in 1923, in what would be its first unexpurgated version for over two hundred years, *Titus* still caused various members of the audience to faint.[30] Deborah Warner's 1987 adaptation, which could claim to be the first to keep the entirety of the text and all its violent moments, was the cause of a similar spell of extreme audience reactions. Fainting fits, frequent visits to the 'vomitorium' and even a death in Paris were recorded by its actors.[31] Even Peter Brook's toned-down version of the play caused so many fainting spells (over twenty in one given performance) that, in the style of the grand guignol, the St. John Ambulance Volunteers waited in

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[27] A. M. Witherspoon, 'Staging of *Titus Andronicus* Gives Alpha Delta Phi Place in Shakespearean History, Yale University [1924]', in *Titus Andronicus: Critical Essays*, pp. 385-7 (p. 385).
[28] Desmond Pratt, ' Red Meat at Stratford: Titus Andronicus Makes its Bow at the Memorial Theatre [1955]', in *Titus Andronicus: Critical Essays*, pp. 389-91 (p. 390).
[29] *Titus Andronicus: The Arden Shakespeare*, ed. by Jonathan Bate (London: Routledge, 1995), 58-9.
[30] *Shakespeare on Stage: Thirteen Leading Actors on Thirteen Leading Roles*, ed. by Julian Curry (London: Nick Horn Books, 2010), p. 2.
[31] Brian Cox, in *Shakespeare on Stage*, p. 13.

check every night.[32] It is no coincidence then that the play was filtered in twentieth-century adaptations through the lens of theatrical traditions specifically concerned with corporeal affect: the production at the Irving Theatre in London was included as part of the grand guignol programme in 1951, and in 1972 the play was presented as a piece of the theatre of cruelty.[33] In both cases it seems unquestionable that the play's use of mutilation was enough to grant it the affective status generally associated with those extreme dramatic genres.

Death and mutilation are present in the play from the very first act. Upon his victorious return from fighting the Goths, General Titus shows his ruthless inflexibility and lack of empathy by asking that one of his war prisoners, Alarbus, be sacrificed in the name of his dead sons. His body is then ravaged, limbs burning upon a pile of wood until 'they be consumed clean' (I.i, 129). This form of retributive violence is what sets in motion the even bloodier and crueller revenge of queen Tamora, Alarbus's mother. Bassianus, the emperor's son, is soon stabbed and a trap is set up for Titus's two remaining sons, who appear guilty of the murder. A forged letter confessing the crime seals their fate at the hands of the emperor, and he sends them to prison to suffer under 'some never-heard-of torturing pain' (II.iii, 285) before their execution. But the worst torture is saved for Lavinia, Titus's only daughter, whose spectacle of mutilation constitutes the play's most affective moment. After her rape, a stage direction indicates that she is to enter with '*her hands cut off and her tongue cut out, ravished*' (II.iv, p. 53). After Demetrius and Chiron have made fun of her and explained that she is now incapable of communicating the crime or the names of her enemies, they leave her to her misery. It is her discovery by Marcus, Lavinia's uncle,

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[32] Scuro, 'Titus Andronicus', p. 400.

[33] Eugene M. Waith, 'Introduction', in William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 51.

which marks the second moment of affect in this scene, not the least because Marcus stands in for a surrogate audience. After his plea that she speak to him, '*Lavinia opens her mouth*', but instead of words, what emerges is 'a crimson river of warm blood' (II.iv, 22). This moment has proved to have a particularly strong effect on audiences and for a long time was deemed difficult to stage effectively. In a performance of Lucy Bailey's production, the most recent, a contemporary critic claimed to having seen 'at least three people in the audience faint[ing]' at the 'point at which [Lavinia] slowly turns her head and lets flow a long stream of black blood from her mouth'.[34] It is an affective moment because it makes an excellent use of corporeal transgression, and also because, to a certain extent, the action is anticipated: Marcus's peripatetic speech prepares us for the gradual understanding of the situation at hand, and the extent of the atrocity is grasped precisely through the discovery of Lavinia's mutilation in the flesh. Even if, as Alan C. Dessen has proposed, Marcus's words are meant to act as a substitute for the actual on-stage representation (i.e. words describe what perhaps may not be shown realistically), the intended outcome is a similar one, that is, a moment of extreme corporeal affect.[35]

Another scene which has caused fainting spells and is notoriously challenging involves the amputation of Titus's right hand in exchange for the life of his sons. The simple stage direction reads '*[Aaron] cuts off Titus' hand*' (III.i, p. 59), for which an axe is used. If no indications of facial expressions or body language are given during the scene, it has proven as difficult as Lavinia's rape. Even Taymor's filmic adaptation, which has no reservations about showing Lavinia in all her ravaged realism, pulls away just before the cleaver connects with the wooden block

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[34] Rosie Millard, 'A Night of Severed Limbs', *New Statesman*, 12 June 2006, p. 50. During the interval another fifteen were reported to have been carried out during this scene.
[35] Alan C. Dessen, *Shakespeare in Performance: Titus Andronicus* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1989), p. 55.

underneath. In an interview with Julian Curry, Brian Cox, who played Titus in Warner's adaptation, went into some detail about the role suggestion plays in this particular moment in the play:

> For cutting off my hand, we put a bag over it and used a wire cheese-cutter. [...] It appeared that my hand was in the bag, which then filled with blood. Everybody gasped, people fainted. We had people literally being carried out [...]. It was always what seemed to be underneath – that was pretty horrific. That element of the production was very powerful.[36]

It is interesting that Cox decides to emphasise the effectiveness of the subtly implied image as opposed to the affective portrayal of defilement. It would seem that, in this case, the moment of corporeal affect is conveyed through the suggestion of amputation, the spectator's imagination connecting the fake blood with the disappearance of the limb. Whether implied or visible, the affect is, once more, similar in its intended outcome to have a certain power over the audience. This is also evident from a closer look at the play's bombastic finale.

After the plot to vex Titus and maim him for life is revealed, the general decides to embark on his own spate of retributive acts. Fooling Demetrius and Chiron to leave the safety of their home, he seizes and 'bind[s] them sure' (V.ii, 160). Titus then describes in the same type of foreclosing speech what their fate is to be: 'Lavinia 'tween her stumps doth hold / The basin that receives your guilty blood' (182-3). Their bones are then ground and mixed with the blood, 'two pasties [made] of [their] shameful heads' (189). This line, often cut out of pre-twentieth century versions of the play for its attack on social decorum, is testimony that words themselves can

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[36] Cox, *Shakespeare on Stage*, p. 8.

sometimes be as affective as the actual moment of mutilation, particularly when they anticipate the horror to come. This speech is followed, in most versions of the play, by the graphic slitting of the Goths' throats. In Warner's adaptation, for example, this is the first instance of actual on-stage bloodshed, and Taymor's film offers a close-up of blood spurting out. This atrocity is followed by the play's climactic scene, which is as corporeally transgressive as anything that has come before it. Inviting Tamora and husband Saturninus to dinner, Titus fulfils his promise by feeding her the remains of her sons 'bakèd in [a] pie' (V.iii, 60). As befits the tragic genre, the ensuing scene features three consecutive slayings, Tamora's, Titus' and then Saturninus', a stage demand that playwrights have found difficult to flesh out elegantly. The succession of events is so brutal and fast that unwanted laughter may be encouraged accidentally. Warner's adaptation, for example, sidestepped this issue by emphasising the visceral reaction expected from the public. By foregrounding a set of actors whose only function was to respond dramatically to the violence, Warner made sure that the audience understood what exact emotion was expected from them. In a way, this treatment of the scene epitomises the very concept of corporeal transgression through a metatheatrical projection of embodied affect. As I will show, contemporary horror uses similar techniques in its own affective investments. *Titus* can, in this regard, be seen as an important predecessor for what I am terming affective corporeal transgression.

New productions of the play would seem to have realised these conceptual similarities between the atrocity exhibition of the original text and horror film, for they are increasingly adopting imagery reminiscent of the genre at its most corporeal. Witness, for example, the blood-splattered presentation poster for Bill Alexander's 2003 production, which featured a close-up of Lavinia's screaming face, borrowed

aesthetically from the slasher tradition. Similarly, one of Lucie Bailey's promotion posters for her 2006 adaptation showed a helpless, bloodied and dirty Lavinia on the floor in an image reminiscent of recent films like *Hostel: Part II* (Eli Roth, 2007), *Captivity* or *Martyrs*. It is not just that the positioning of the maimed character on stage looks familiar to the horror scholar; the extreme realism that permeated the performance also acted as a form of rejection of the formerly celebrated subtlety of productions like Brook's. It is necessary, however, to point out that I do not wish to suggest that *Titus Andronicus* and a film like *Saw* are related in their execution or treatment of mutilation, or that contemporary *Titus* productions are derivative of torture porn. Instead, I think it might be useful to understand the success of films like *Saw* alongside the consistent and solid recuperation of Shakespeare's play in the last decade. This would allow us to see *Titus* as part of a contemporary negotiation of the role of mutilation and torture in entertainment. In fact, *Saw* and *Titus* have more than a few things in common. Both have at their heart the figure of the revenger and are concerned with power, particularly the limits between its rightful exertion and madness. Both *Titus* and *Saw* exploit mutilation visually to create affect and have been incredibly popular as a consequence.[37] Finally, both *Titus* and *Saw* have been dismissed for their exploitation of violence and inherently bleak portrayal of the world.[38]

Jonathan Bate, who has consistently drawn links between horror films and *Titus*, has suggested that Shakespeare's play has a tendency to resurface in times where horror and violence seem like appropriate theatrical subjects.[39] It would seem

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[37] It is worth remembering that, together with Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* (1587), another particularly bloody piece, *Titus Andronicus*, was one of the most popular plays of its day. See Waith, 'Introduction', p. 1.
[38] Hunter, 'Shakespeare's Earliest Tragedies', p. 114.
[39] Bate, *Titus Andronicus and Timon of Athens*, p.109.

that the fact that *Titus* has been reactivated recently, and this in its most integral versions both at script and textual levels, is precisely due to the momentousness of the text. *Titus* can draw on contemporary fears (specific to the twenty-first century, like terrorism or the fall of the Twin Towers) and be an emblematic 'tragedy of blood' at one and the same time. In an early article on the aesthetics of mutilation in the play, Albert Tricomi contended that 'by shackling the metaphoric imagination to the literal reality of the play's events, the tragedy strived for an unrelieved concentration of horrific effect'.[40] I would like to propose that the capacity of *Titus* to elicit this 'horrific effect' is a result of the text's masterful affective workings, and not its metaphorical sphere, although the latter may act as an interesting and powerful subtext. Such a view liberates *Titus* from its contextual enclave and helps us understand why the last decade has been so preoccupied with what lies outside the limits of ordinary bodily representation, that is, its corporeal and transgressive glory.

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[40] Albert H. Tricomi, 'The Aesthetics of Mutilation', in *Shakespeare's Early Tragedies*, pp. 99-113 (p. 111).

Section 2. The Gothic Stage

The previous section assessed the ways in which pain and pity may be considered the most important elements in tragedy, and how they were generally obtained through the off-stage mortification of the body. The dismemberment and mutilation typical of Greek tragedy was inherited by medieval theatre and culminated in early modern revenge drama.[41] I have therefore pointed to *Titus Andronicus* as an example of a play in which the terrorised and violated body is used for affective purposes at one remove from symbolic or metaphorical meanings. This section focuses on the gradual incorporation of affect through spectacle onto what we could call, retrospectively, the Gothic stage (1760-1820). I open with a brief discussion of how phantasmagoria shows and advances in optical illusions allowed for special effects to be used on stage. I move on to show how these, in turn, gradually led to secular spectacles by focusing on plays like Matthew Lewis's *The Castle Spectre* (1797). Finally I turn to Joanna Baillie's anatomical theatre of the passions, and her consequent updating of tragic conventions, for a possible precursor to the surgical theatres of the grand guignol. The latter borrowed largely from the Gothic literary tradition, and Antonin Artaud, who will be considered at the end of the chapter, even wrote an adaptation of Lewis's *The Monk* (1796).

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[41] I have no space in this thesis to assess the implications of the deep religious messages embedded within the mutilation scenes of medieval plays. On this subject, see Margaret E. Owens, *Stages of Dismemberment: The Fragmented Body in Early Medieval and Early Modern Drama* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 2005), pp. 48-114.

Special Effects and the Influence of Phantasmagoria

'Horror art has always called for technical innovation'.[42]

This section aims to consolidate the importance of dramatic affect in the development of corporeal horror by turning to Gothic plays.[43] Their ground-breaking emphasis on special effects would mark the beginning of a cinematic thrust for audience impact that would culminate in early horror cinema. For example, the opening credits scene for the film *The Cat and the Canary* (Paul Leni, 1927), a horror film based on a successful non-supernatural play, included an ingenious and influential sequence where a hairy, sharp-nailed hand springs forward from the screen to remove a number of cobwebs impairing spectatorial vision. The first adaptations to cinema of well-known Gothic figures yielded similar visual pleasures based around the creation of fear. *Frankenstein* (J. Searle Dawley, 1910), for example, could afford the luxury of presenting a particularly scary monster through the use of light and setting in a scene that would have had a limited impact on a stage. More importantly, the experimental director George Méliès, whose *Le Manoir du diable* (1896) has been considered the first vampire film, was credited with inventing optical effects unique to cinema.[44] For example, his accidental discovery of the stop-trick technique allowed filmmakers to create the illusions of physical transformation. Such a discourse of technological innovation is, not surprisingly, also present in the very first accounts of the Gothic stage.

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[42] Paula R. Backscheider, *Spectacular Politics: Theatrical Power and Mass Culture in Early Modern England* (London and Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1993), p. 169

[43] By the word Gothic I am referring to the first wave of this literary mode, which spans the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, roughly 1764-1820. These dates coincide with the publications of what have been seen as the founding Gothic text, Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, and its last and late example, Charles Robert Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer*.

[44] Stacey Abbott, *Celluloid Vampires: Life after Death in the Modern World* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2007), p. 1.

Miles Peter Andrews, in the preface to his 1789 Gothic drama *The Enchanted Castle* (also known as *The Castle of Wonders*), introduced his play as a 'novelty' dramatisation inspired by Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and Miss Aikin's fragment *Sir Bertrand* (1773).[45] The spectacle was a dramatic experiment that intended 'to bring upon the stage somewhat of the effects which may be produced by midnight horror or agency supernatural'.[46] Such an experiment would deviate from previous moderate representations of ghosts by emphasising 'the clank of chains, the whistling of hollow winds, the clapping of doors, gigantic forms, and visionary gleams of light attended not their effects upon stage'.[47] As we can see, for a Gothic play as early as Andrews's, the idea of staging affect is already premised upon the suggestive use of images, sounds and light. This is not unusual, given that by the time of successes like *The Castle Spectre*, tragedy as a form itself was felt to be succumbing to the weight of special effects and scenery tricks. In *The Secret Tribunal: A Play* (1795), James Boaden, a celebrated Gothic playwright in his own right, wrote of how

> The changeling FASHION now disdains to pay
>
> Her sullen tribute to the *serious* lay,
>
> While cold and impotent our Authors move,
>
> And scorn to wake or PITY, FEAR or LOVE,
>
> By *secondary* means they strive to praise,
>
> With *flags*, *spears*, *helmets* and *processions* rife,

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[45] Quoted in Bertrand Evans, *The Origins of the Modern Study of Gothic Drama, together with a Re-Edition of Gothic Drama from Walpole to Shelley (1947)*, ed. by Frederick S. Frank (Lampeter and Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006), p. 93.

[46] Ibid. I assess the implications of the supernatural element later in the next section.

[47] Ibid.

"Pride, pomp and circumstance" of scenic strife,

To storied deeds of bold emprise they lead,

An army conquered – or a nation freed –

Prompters and *properties* their pow'rs unite

And *drum*, *fife*, *trumpet*, rouse the mimic fight

Hark! HERE a *charge* – the *trumpet* – THERE *retreat* –

A VICTORY *here* – *tattoo* – and *there* DEFEAT

Thus ACTION bustle is, and PASSION rage,

As Bards decree, or mightier Chiefs engage,

While as the fight grows *warm*, the Pit are *froze*,

The Audience *shiver* as the Actor *glows*.[48]

Passion and action had taken over the stage. Strong feelings like pity, fear or love no longer relied solely on the wit of the playwright, but were also achieved through 'secondary means' like music or particular dramatic gimmicks. For example, plays like Matthew Lewis's *Timour the Tartar* (1811) were written in order to profit from the early eighteenth century craze for real horses in theatres, and Isaac Pocock's *The Miller and His Men* (1842) went so far as blow up a mill on stage.[49] In fact, Gothic plays, with the advantage of the elaborate and ominous physical presence of their settings and their excessive violence, can be seen retrospectively as achieving an

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[48] James Boaden, 'Prologue', in *The Secret Tribunal: A Play* (London: T. N. Longman, 1795), no pagination.
[49] Paul Ranger, *'Terror and Pity Reign in Every Breast': Gothic Drama in the London Patent Theatres, 1750-1820* (London: The Society for Theatre Research, 1991), pp. 81, 85.

'unrelieved atmosphere of mystery, gloom, and terror' that novels or short stories could only conjure up in the imagination of the reader.[50] In his founding text on Gothic drama, Bertrand Evans already posited affect as the main indicator of 'Gothicity' when he explained that all of the other tropes of the genre were only valuable insofar as they were conducive to producing a very specific type of effect on the audience. The features that serve to identify a Gothic play are thus the same as those of the Gothic novel, namely 'specialized settings, machinery, character types, themes, plots, and techniques selected and combined to serve a primary purpose of exploring mystery, gloom and terror'.[51]

If proto-Gothic elements can been traced back to plays like John Home's *Douglas* (1756) or Hall Harston's *The Countess of Salisbury* (1765), Horace Walpole's *The Mysterious Mother*, written in 1768 but never performed in his lifetime, is perhaps the first example of a Gothic play that already shows signs of a clear intention to affect audiences. A simple and highly effective melodrama, Walpole thought of it as a creative experiment that could never see the light of day due to its investment in indecorous behaviour. What is interesting about this text is that it managed to create scandal without ever being staged. Its impact on audiences would have relied on a non-technological form of affect, namely scandal. In *The Mysterious Mother*, incest piles upon incest: a terrible episode of materno-filial copulation is followed by the illegitimate relationship between Adeliza, the resulting daughter, and her father/brother. The play was doomed to critical failure, and if we are to believe its author's words, only saw the light of day despite Walpole himself, who did not

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[50] Evans, *Gothic Drama*, p. 44.
[51] Evans, *Gothic Drama*, p. 25.

'think[...] it worthy of being offered to the public'.[52] In the preface to the 1781 edition, the playwright explained that the text, which would go on to circulate in very carefully selected circles, was only printed in order to avoid the aggravation of a possible fraudulent edition.[53] Walpole went some way towards legitimising the possible affective violence of *The Mysterious Mother* in its postscript, where he claimed that the reason for his choice of subject was that it was 'horrid', 'that it would shock'.[54] The play would be successful in causing such an effect because parricide is 'the deepest degree of murder' and 'no age but has suffered such guilt to be presented on stage'.[55] For Walpole, the playful exploitation of taboo would necessarily 'have a singular effect in operating a revolution in the passions, and in interesting the spectator'.[56] What is intriguing about this remark is that it does not compromise the play's capacity to operate as an affective text, but rather that such a feat marks its downfall in terms of intellectual merit. In order for it to have been a good tragedy, *The Mysterious Mother* should have worked 'in the two essential springs of terror and pity', but the fact that 'so much is our delicacy more apt to be shocked than our good-nature' means that the extremely horrid quality of the text takes over completely.[57] If nothing else, *The Mysterious Mother* shows that spectatorial affect was at the forefront of authorial intent in the Gothic stage.

This affective quality, as I have shown, is directly inherited from the tragic predecessors analysed in the previous section of this chapter. In fact, Gothic scholars like E. J. Clery have supported 'the wider claim that Gothic writing was part of a

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[52] Horace Walpole, 'Preface to the 1781 Edition', in *Horace Walpole: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Peter Sabor (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 136.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Horace Walpole, *The Mysterious Mother: A Tragedy* (London: J. Archer, W. Jones, and R. White, 1791), p. 84.
[55] Ibid., pp. 84-5.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid., p. 84.

trans-generic resurgence of tragedy towards the end of the eighteenth century'.[58] But if on-stage corporeal transgression has a long history steeped in tragedy, there is a productive manner in which we can read the Gothic stage as exploiting these elements to new and greater extents. As Clery puts it,

> while emotion was also an important ingredient in sentimental fiction, Gothic took its characters and readers to new extremes of feeling, through the representation of scenes and events well beyond the normal range of experience. Stage tragedy was a vital model in this respect, and Gothic emulated its effects of hyperbolic emotion.[59]

This discussion considers the Gothic novel in particular, but Clery also refers to the popularity of Shakespearean actresses like Sarah Siddons, who famously managed to create a lingering effect on her audiences.[60] Thus, if we are to read Gothic plays as partaking of the same obsession as the novel in the creation of visceral reactions, it is crucial that we first understand how such effects may be arrived at. The Gothic stage owed as much to the technological developments in staging and performance as it did to the inflamed imaginations of its playwrights. Advances in props and scenery techniques were ultimately linked to discoveries made in the field of optical illusion and what we could now loosely term proto-cinema. If Gothic was to establish a direct corporeal connection with its public, it needed to rely on methods that would ensure the visceral participation of theatre-goers. The development and popularity of shows based on optic illusions therefore played a major role in the reification of affective drama.

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[58] E. J. Clery, *Women's Gothic: From Clara Reeve to Mary Shelley* (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2000), p. 23.
[59] Ibid., p. 13.
[60] For the relevance of Sarah Siddons' work to the Gothic stage see Backscheider, *Spectacular Politics*, pp. 204-17.

In a recent book on the influence of technology on the Gothic, David J. Jones argues that visual gimmicks like those implemented in phantasmagoria shows, the diorama or magic lantern performances have been crucial to what we now understand as the genre. This does not simply imply that Gothic texts such as Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) or J. Sheridan Le Fanu's fiction make substantial references to visual illusions, or that they often express moments of terror through similar metaphors.[61] It also emphasises the fact that visual media are often imbued with a demonic or Gothic discourse of dread. Early depictions of the printing process, for instance, are haunted by corporeal violence, as the first depiction of a print shop, published by Matthias Huss in 1499, would seem to suggest. In this image, the workers in a print shop can be seen wrestling with corpse-like figures come to either distract or destroy them. Similar fears are still perceptible in the recent success of horror films like Hideo Nakata's *Ringu* (1998) or Geoffrey Sax's *White Noise* (2005), with their gloomy treatments of the possible catastrophic consequences of new media.[62] The relationship between technology and the Gothic should be seen as symbiotic: phantasmagoria shows would often use slides inspired by Gothic novels like M. G. Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) and would borrow figures from popular horror tales. For their part, Gothic plays like George Colman the Younger's *Blue-Beard* or James Boaden's *Fountainville Forest* (1794), would show the influence of lanternists in displays of effects that would enable the apparition of ghostly scrolls on stage.[63] Even though Gothic is more traditionally studied as a prose phenomenon developing from what Clara Reeve termed the new Gothic romance, the reality is that for contemporary writers and critics like Samuel Taylor Coleridge or the Marquis de Sade there was very little difference

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[61] David J. Jones, *Gothic Machine: Textualities, Pre-Cinematic Media and Film in Popular Visual Culture, 1670-1910* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011), pp. 1-2, 89-90.
[62] Jones, *Gothic Machine*, p. 21.
[63] Ibid., p. 42.

between literary romances and lantern shows.[64] Recent critical interventions are trying

to redress this situation: Robert Miles, who has recently explored this territory, has

already acknowledged such visual displays as part of the Gothic, and Catherine

Spooner has mentioned the importance of stage melodramas to a fuller understanding

of the genre.[65]

As we can see, both the phantasmagoria show and the Gothic drama are

irremediably connected by the need to create an impact on the spectator. David J.

Jones' study of Etienne-Gaspard Robertson's Belgian show *Fantasmagorie* (1799)

specifically links the impact of visual games on contemporaneous audiences with the

type of stimuli sought in recent horror films like *Paranormal Activity*, and goes on to

suggest that one of its scenes borrows directly from Robertson's door trick.[66]

Similarly, Christopher Baugh has identified Philippe de Loutherbourg's street art

display 'Eudophusikon', which opened in Leicester Square in 1781 and consisted of

moving pictures that would represent natural phenomena through the use of mirrors

and pulleys, as a first instance of proto-cinematic affect which would 'absorb[...] the

spectator into scenes of the supernatural and the sensational, as well as into the worlds

of landscape and photography'.[67] It is important to remember, however, that as much

as the Gothic stage and the phantasmagoria usually had recourse to the supernatural as

a means of creating affect, they did not depend on an actual belief in the apparitions

themselves. Instead, they often relied on visual attacks through lunging at audiences or

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[64] See Clara Reeve, *The Progress of Romance and the History of Charoba, Queen of Egypt*, ed. by Esther McGill (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2007); Jones, *Gothic Machine*, pp. 48, 54.

[65] Robert Miles, 'Introduction: Gothic Romance as Visual Technology', *Praxis: Gothic Technologies, Visuality in the Romantic Era* (2005), <http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/gothic/intro/miles.html> [accessed February 2012]; Catherine Spooner, 'Introduction: Gothic in Contemporary Popular Culture', *Gothic Studies*, 9 (2007), 1-5 (p.1).

[66] Jones, *Gothic Machine*, p. 66. See Mervyn Heard, *Phantasmagoria: The Secret History of the Magic Lantern* (Hastings: The Projection Box, 2006), pp. 85-116, for more detailed information on the particulars of this show.

[67] Christopher Baughm 'The Eidophusikon, Coalbrookdale and the Spectacle of Philippe de Loutherbourg', in *Picture of Britain*, 'The Heart of England', pres. David Dimbleby, *BBC*, September 2005.

forcing them to see horrific images. Marina Warner has suggested that we read the first spectators of these shows as 'willing, excitable victim[s]' and the spectacles themselves as the beginning of a type of 'secular entertainment' that pre-dates the first visual assaults of film history in the shape of the Lumière brothers' train advancing towards its audience.[68] Similarly, the Gothic stage would become renowned for its visual spectacle and its capacity to have a direct and corporeal effect on its audience, something that would eclipse the atrocities of the early modern tradition. Jeffrey N. Cox explains that 'the Gothic theatre of shock and wonder was arguably the first form to capitalize fully on evolving lighting techniques, new stage effects, and the increasing presence of continuous music behind the action'.[69] Such 'stage sensationalism' is not necessarily predicated on the supernatural, but rather on the capacity to powerfully terrify the audience, to shock them out of their wits.[70] This is evidenced in James Boaden's stage adaptation of Matthew Lewis's *The Monk*, retitled *Aurelio and Miranda* (1798), which famously dispensed with the supernatural aspect so intrinsic to the novel, and also in Lewis's *The Castle Spectre*. It is to the latter work that I now turn in order to map out the beginning of a connection between Cox's ideas about 'a theatre of sensation' and the Gothic plays popular at the end of the eighteenth century.

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[68] Marina Warner, *Phantasmagoria: Spirit Visions, Metaphors, and Media into the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 147-51.
[69] Jeffrey N. Cox, 'English Gothic Theatre', in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic*, ed. by Jerrold E. Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 125-44 (p. 127).
[70] Ibid., pp. 128, 132.

Matthew Lewis's Secular Spectacles, or, Affect Sells

'Horror! – What form is this?'[71]

Matthew Lewis's intention to affect theatre-goers is well documented. His *The Captive* (1803) was famously withdrawn after its premiere managed to terrify the public beyond what was expected, and a scene that included filicide in *The Castle Spectre* had to be dropped from performance for its excessive nature.[72] Despite Lewis's attempts to legitimise tragedy and adapt it to suit the sensibility of the time, as in *Alfonso, King of Castille* (1802) or *Adelgitha* (1807), he is better remembered for the stage tricks that he brought to his dramatic pieces.[73] His *Rugantino, or The Bravo of Venice* (1805) was applauded for its use of sets and machinery, and after a performance of *One O'Clock! Or, The Knight and The Wood Daemon* (1811) one commentator expressed his belief that it was difficult 'to imagine that stage-effect can be carried farther, or rendered more grandly impressive'.[74] Moreover, when the spectacular was subtracted from the play and the action turned into a moral lesson, as was the case with the aforementioned adaptation of *The Monk*, the result was invariably met with displeasure by audiences.[75] Lewis's biggest chiller, *The Castle Spectre*, relied for initial success on its capacity to cause affect and is testimony to the

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[71] Matthew Gregory Lewis, *The Castle Spectre: A Drama. In Five Acts* (London: J. Bell, 1798), V.iii, p. 98. This facsimile is reprinted by Woodstock Books: Oxford and New York, 1990 and introduced by Jonathan Wordsworth. Future references to pages (no lines are provided) will be given parenthetically in the text.

[72] Jeffrey N. Cox, *Seven Gothic Dramas 1769-1825* (Athens: University of Ohio Press, 1992), p. 225; Jeffrey N. Cox, *In the Shadows of Romance: Romantic Tragic Drama in Germany, England and France* (Athens: Oho University Press, 1989), p. 116. Accounts vary on the number of fainting spells, which sometimes change from nine to two. See Louis F. Peck, *A Life of Matthew Lewis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961), p. 91

[73] Cox, *In the Shadows of Romance*, pp. 140-1.

[74] D. L. Macdonald, *Monk Lewis: A Critical Biography* (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 2000), pp. 163-4; prefatory remarks by one 'P.P', quoted in Peck, *A Life of Matthew G. Lewis*, p. 106.

[75] Joseph James Irwin, *M.G. 'Monk' Lewis* (Boston: Twayne, 1976), p. 48.

fact that, once social and historical coordinates change, a text's affective capacity might become ineffective. When the play was revived in 1880, its histrionic style, once at home on the Gothic stage, was found so extreme to the taste of the time that scenes which had previously been the source of shivers ended up causing laughter in the audience. Once the play's capacity to impact and shock had been reduced to mockery, the overall effect of the play fell to pieces.[76] *The Castle Spectre* is, regardless of its current affective import, an important part of my dramatic genealogy in this chapter. Not only was it premised on the creation of spectatorial affect, but the play is also a perfect example of the secular spectacles that followed the Elizabethan stage in its innovative use of a very material ghostly body.

The Castle Spectre has been credited with starting the dramatic vogue for spooky misadventures in ruined castles, deserted and lurid dungeons or gloomy abbeys initiated in prose by Horace Walpole.[77] The second act begins with a character feigning to be a ghost by hiding inside an armour suit, and the prologue already gives vent to the Gothic's reimagining of romance as inseparable from the horrific and fantastic:

> Far from the haunts of men, of vice the fore,
>
> The moon-struck child of genius and of woe,
>
> Versed in each magic spell, and dear to fame,
>
> A fair enchantress dwells, Romance her name.
>
> She loathes the sun, or blazing taper's light:

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[76] Ibid., p. 69.
[77] Sybil Rosenfeld, *A Short History of Scene Design in Great Britain* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1973), p. 97.

The moon-beam'd landscape and tempestuous night

Alone she loves; and oft, with glimmering lamp,

Near graves new-open'd, or 'midst dungeons damp,

Drear forest, ruin'd isles, and haunted towers,

Forlorn she roves, and raves away the hours! ('Prologue', p. iii)

If the cemeteries, dungeons and haunted forests evoked in this preliminary passage were not enough to establish the play's Gothic credentials, its plot could not be more generic. Osmond, who had Angela's father (his brother) killed, aims to inherit the family's possessions by marrying Angela against her wishes. It is soon revealed that he was also to blame for the death of Angela's mother, Evelina, who appears to the heroine in the play's most famous scene. The rest of the plot can be easily deduced: Reginald was never murdered, but instead kept prisoner by Osmond's servant, Kenrick, in the dungeon of a castle where 'moveable pannels', 'subterraneous passages' and 'secret springs' are abundant (II.ii. p. 31). The play duly restores the heir to his rightful throne and Angela avenges her mother's death by stabbing Osmond with the same knife he once used on Evelina. Lewis's rather formulaic plot – he himself acknowledged the influence of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* – is spiced up by comic scenes where a couple of black servants expose the tyranny of their lords and a monastic father is shown to be a little too keen on carnal pleasures. However, Lewis's tragi-comedy is steeped in a universe of decay and destruction, and this is possibly the main reason for its success. The Gothic stage could afford to bring fear into the actual bodies of the audience by making physical what had, until then, remained a reading experience. In other words, part of the genius of staging the Gothic was that it allowed

for corporeal affect to take place at a new sensorial level that included vision and sound.

Equally seminal were the play's settings, and Lewis's instructions in the script are very particular about their spectacular specifics. In one of the eeriest scenes in the play, the underground chamber in which Reginald is being kept captive is described in minute detail. The '*gloomy subterraneous Dungeon*' is '*wide and lofty*', and, in a line that reveals some of the fascination that ruins held for Gothic writers, the ceiling is described as having '*in several places fallen in, and left large chasms*' (V.iii.p. 88). The chthonic quality of the scene, something that would later be applied to the underground settings of films like *Saw*, is foregrounded by pointing out that '*[o]n one side are various passages leading to the other Caverns*' (88). These scenic demands were typical of other Gothic dramas, and they had an obvious effect in the work of landscape artists like Thomas Greenwood, bringing about a change in the painted settings and structure of the theatres themselves.[78] They are also an indication of the extent to which Gothic melodrama would become inextricable from efficacious props, something which suggests a correlation between spectacular realism and affect also apparent in the grand guignol.[79] In this respect, it is important to note that, despite *The Castle Spectre*'s success, with forty-seven performances in one season – it came second only to Colman's *Blue-Beard* –, the play still managed to make a loss for Drury Lane due to the high cost of the spectacle itself.[80] As we can see, staging is crucial for affective impact, but Gothic plays did not merely rely on the *mise-en-scène* for such purposes.

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[78] Ibid, pp. 96-7. Later on William Capon would go on to design the Gothic library in George Colman the Younger's *The Iron Chest* (1796), another important addition to the canon of Gothic melodrama.

[79] See Colin Visser, 'Scenery and Technical Design', in *The London Theatre World, 1660-1800*, ed. by Robert D. Hume (London and Amsterdam: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980), pp. 66-118, p. 80.

[80] Data taken from *The London Stage, 1660-1800*, ed. by Charles Beecham Hogan, 5 (1968), 1991. See also Joseph Donohue, 'The London Theatre at the End of the Eighteenth Century', in *The London Theatre World*, pp. 337-70, p. 364.

If mutilation does not necessarily feature heavily in *The Castle Spectre*, or indeed in most Gothic plays, the after-effects of torture and tyranny are often portrayed in order to achieve similar spectatorial results. Reginald is described appearing on stage in a manner that could not have failed to cause sympathy and pity in the audience. According to the stage directions he looks *'pale and emaciated'*, wears *'coarse garments'*, has *'a chain bound round his body'* and is found *'sleeping upon a bed of straw'* (88). The consequences of violence are also explored through the use of haunting and spectres, a form of delayed study of cruelty and vengeance not unlike the one popularised by Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1600). Evelina's ghost was ground-breaking because it refused to be explained away in the Radcliffean fashion, asserting its very material, even abject, presence in the play. For example, when describing Evelina in his prophetic dream, Osmond invokes her not as an ethereal being, but as an incredibly visceral body. As he embraces her, 'the face gr[ows] pale, a stream of blood gush[es] from her bosom!', 'the flesh f[alls] from her bones, her eyes burst from their sockets: a skeleton loathsome and meagre, clasp[s] him in her mouldering arms' as '[h]er infected breath [...] mingl[es] with [his]; her rotting fingers [his] hand' (Iv.i.p. 67). It is this materiality, as well as her entrance on the stage, which was described by some as the most 'terrific' and 'sublime' entrance ever performed on stage, that leads me to read Evelina as a secular ghost.[81] For if the play does not deny the afterlife, the focus of fear does not necessarily rely on the ghostly quality of the spectre as a supernatural entity. Affect is generated, in this case, through the use of stage machinery and a ghost that, unlike any that had come before, bleeds on stage.

The relevance of this scene in Act IV was not lost on Lewis's publishers, and the drawing chosen for the wood engraving that acted as a frontispiece to the

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[81] *Monthly Mirror* (1807), quoted in Peck, *Life of Matthew Lewis*, p. 95.

contemporary but undated John Cumberland edition shows precisely Evelina's entrance.[82] In this image, Angela kneels down in front of the ghost, a figure in white with a trail of blood reaching all the way down to her ankles. This reflects quite faithfully the original stage directions, which describe Evelina as '*a tall female figure, her white and flowing garments spotted with blood*' (IV.ii, p. 79). The scene itself does not end here, however, and its use of corporeal transgression could be described as one of the most affective moments in the Gothic stage. Evelina's ghost is not just stained in gore, but when she lifts her eyes, '*her arms extended towards heaven, [...] a large wound appears upon her bosom*' (p. 79). The sudden emergence of this 'large wound' would have posed some difficulty, but could have been suggested by bursting a receptacle containing real or simulated blood. Even then, the difficulty of presenting this visceral moment convincingly and in a way that will be conducive to affect may be compared to Lavinia's mutilated entrance in *Titus*. Since blood is already present in Evelina's splattered garments, the emphasis of a new wound, one that suddenly materialises in the eyes of the audience, can only be understood as an intentional move towards additional affect. This would seem to be exploited by the scene's use of light and sound. When Evelina appears in the middle of the Oratory, the illumination centres on her as she throws back her veil to show '*a melancholy countenance*' (p. 79). Her magnificence is stressed by Angela's actions, who sinks down on her knees immediately. Music also plays an important role here. Ceasing momentarily as Angela bids her not to leave, her departure is marked by its affective use: '*The Spectre waves her hand, as bidding her farewell. Instantly the organ's swell is heard*' (p. 80). The unexpected sound of the organ peaks in the form of '*a full chorus of female voices*' that '*chant "Jubilate!"*' (p. 80) as '*a blaze of light flashes through the Oratory*' (p.

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[82] A replica can be found in *The Hour of One: Six Gothic Melodramas*, ed. by Stephen Wischhusen (London and Bedford: The Gordon Fraser Gallery, 1975), p. 35.

80). All this momentous action ends in an equally climactic finale where *'the folding doors close with a loud noise'* and Angela *'falls motionless on the floor'* (p. 80)

As we can see, Lewis's stage directions are interesting for at least two reasons. Firstly, they indicate that the ghost is both prefigured and evacuated through spectacle; lights and music signal her entrance and exit, much as her previous appearance in Act V culminates in 'a loud clap of thunder' (IV.i. p. 62). Secondly, the actual ghost is nowhere near as corporeally transgressed as Osmond imagines in his feverish dreams. Evelina's image is, actually, mostly marked by a touch of melancholia and Angela does not recoil in disgust from her. However, the fact that Evelina's wounds are nowhere near as graphic as Lavinia's amputated body did not seem to prevent audiences from reacting most viscerally to the ghost. Contemporaneous reviews like the ones published in the *European Magazine* (1798) spoke of its affective qualities when they wrote 'that the gestures of the ghost operate[d] very forcibly on the audience', and stage biographer M. J. Young later praised the ghost for 'the power it still retains over the feelings of the audience'.[83] Complaints about the use of the ghost as a form of spectatorial abuse did not take long to appear, and Lewis was forced to add a postscript in which he defended the play:

> Against *my Spectre* many objections have been urged: one of them I think rather curious. She ought not to appear, because the belief in Ghosts no longer exists! In my opinion, that is the very reason she may be produced without danger; for there is now no fear of increasing the influence of superstition, or strengthening the prejudices of the weak-minded. I confess I cannot see any reason why Apparitions may not be as well permitted to stalk in a tragedy, as

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[83] *European Magazine*, 23 (1798), 42, and Mary Julia Young, *Memoirs of Mrs Crouch*, 2 vols. (London: James Asperne, 1806), I, p. 282. Both quoted in Ranger, *'Terror and Pity'*, pp. 123, 125.

Fairies be suffered to fly in a pantomime, or Heathen Gods and Goddesses to

cut capers in a grand ballet (pp. 102-3).

Lewis seems to be reclaiming the secularity of the ghost's affective quality: the cause

of the horror should not have come from the supernatural quality of the apparition, but

rather from the staging of the scene. Lewis himself seems to have been aware of how

much the affective qualities of this key scene relied on theatrical elements that were

ultimately alien to his writing, and in his postscript expressed his doubt as to the

play's reception in the closet once stripped of 'its beautiful music, splendid scenery,

and, above all, of the acting' (p. 103).

The Castle Spectre is thus a perfect example of how the transgressive quality

of a piece, its potential to disrupt the contemporary status quo, is just as important as

special effects. The ghost in *The Castle Spectre* obviously works at a surface level:

audiences were affected by the physical presence of Evelina's bleeding, but equally

monstrous was the idea of the murdered mother and the semi-incestuous relationship

between Osmond and Angela. At the same time, as we know from Lewis's failure

with *The Captive* (1803), unless affective triumph is linked to some other form of

sublimation that rejects horror as the end-product itself, Gothic plays were bound to be

disregarded. That horror remained a means to an end, generally a happy ending via

marriage, was ensured by the interference of stage censors. Diaries from theatre-goers

seem to testify to the fact that, just as torture porn is now maligned for its excess,

gratuitous horror was frowned upon and taken as a tell-tale sign of poor dramatic

writing skills in the Gothic stage.[84] Precisely because they respect the laws of

decorum, the Gothic works of Joanna Baillie offer a perfect counterpart to Lewis's

spectacles. Her plays suffered a very different fate from that of *The Castle Spectre*,

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[84] See Ranger, *'Pity and Terror'*, p. 143.

even if *De Monfort* (1798) was also performed at Drury Lane theatre.[85] Her dramatic

project, which I consider in the next section, offers a good example of a very different

type of corporeal affect. It provides a necessary illustration of how affect was not only

conjured through spectacle, but also through a conscious merging of the tragic and

Gothic forms. Baillie's notion of sympathetic curiosity started an anatomical form of

theatre useful to this project because it establishes a direct line between the Gothic

stage, generally associated with the melodramatic, and tragedy.

Sympathetic Curiosity and Joanna Baillie's Anatomical Theatre

> 'For the bravest man on earth knows what fear is as well as the coward; and
>
> will not refuse to be interested for one under the dominion of this passion'.[86]

Joanna Baillie's plays are largely explorations into the immediacy and expression of

the passions recognisable in human nature, as well as their on-stage transmission to

the audience. Her dramatic project aims to dissect and examine their evolution, a

characteristic that recently won her the title of 'passionate anatomist'.[87] This form of

affective theatre began with the first volume of the *Plays on the Passions* (1798),

which included the 'Introductory Discourse', a preface that acts as a very succinct

declaration of the work's rationale, and *De Monfort*, her most successful Gothic play.

I focus my attention on both these texts in the rest of this section and attempt to

ascertain Baillie's specific affective methodology. I am invoking Baillie's work in this

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[85] See Sir Walter Scott, *Marmion: A Tale of Flodden Field*, 3rd edn (London: John Murray, 1808), p. 122. In his third canto he calls Baillie 'the bold enchantress' and later claims that in *De Monfort* and *Count Basil* 'Shakespeare lived again'.
[86] Joanna Baillie, 'Introductory Discourse', in *Plays on the Passions*, ed. by Peter Duthie (Letchworth and New York: Broadview, 2001), p. 72
[87] Deirdre Elizabeth Gilbert, 'Joanna Baillie: Passionate Anatomist', *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 64 (2003), University of Denver.

project because it also makes a very specific connection between the conveyance of dangerous passions (excessive anger, love, fear, hatred, etc.) and the body of the actor. In fact, Baillie's plays can be seen as a strand of affective theatre different from its other Gothic counterparts, for they do not rely solely on the staging of violence; the foregrounding of a certain tragic pathos is equally important to them. Her portrayal of characters in the agonistic throes of feelings they cannot comprehend, and the transmutation of these onto a potential audience, results in a compromising type of drama that utilises spectacle for affective purposes. But unlike Lewis's, Baillie's plays would be concerned simultaneously with the instigation of pity.

Baillie begins her 'Introductory Discourse' by explaining how drama is affected by 'those ideas regarding human nature, as they in some degree affect almost every species of moral writings'.[88] For her, drama is necessarily tied down to the sympathy and curiosity caused by the pain of others, a notion that had recently been explored by Edmund Burke in his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757). In her preface, Baillie invokes the spectacle of the scaffold as an example of the spectatorial dynamic she expects to recreate with her plays. Such public instances fulfil a titillating need for vicariousness steeped in compassion:

> It cannot be any pleasure we receive from the sufferings of a fellow-creature which attracts such multitudes of people to a publick [*sic*] execution, though it is the horror we conceive for such a spectacle that keeps so many more away. To see a human being bearing himself up under such circumstances, or struggling with the terrible apprehensions which such a situation impresses,

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[88] Baillie, 'Introductory Discourse', p. 67.

must be the powerful incentive, which makes us press forward to behold what we shrink from, and wait with trembling expectation for what we dread.[89]

Baillie's argument is that very few take sadistic pleasure in spectacles of violence and that they therefore cannot be pleasantly tolerated if encountered accidentally. Similarly, context and a certain set of expectations are crucial to the consumption of corporeal transgression on the stage. For Baillie, the fact that a certain predisposition is needed before scenes of mutilation can be enjoyed proves that there is 'no natural love of cruelty', but rather the wish to dissect our struggle with human emotions.[90] Such a theory thus necessarily entails the existence of a will to see, even if the spectacle is being appreciated for its tragic component instead of its graphic nature. Suffering, if not mutilation, is perceived as a potentially universal pleasure. This is also true, more generally, of Baillie's particular dramatic project. In her plays, there is a clear link between vicarious participation in the hero/ine's tragic flaw and the positive effect of a play's moralistic content. The reason the passions need to be conveyed through affect is that 'the potential for social instruction is greatest in scenes most titillating to audiences'.[91] The consequent 'unveiling' of the 'human' is sure to 'improve[...] us by the knowledge we acquire of our own minds' and establishes the importance of vicariousness to the theatrical experience.[92] Ultimately, for the passions to work on the audience fully, the latter need to partake of the on-stage body by feeling it as somehow contiguous with theirs. Baillie understands this moment of 'sympathetick curiosity', fuelled by spectatorial identification with the suffering on-

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[89] Ibid., p. 69.
[90] Ibid., pp. 69-70, n.2.
[91] Michael Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic: Genre, Reception and Canon Formation* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 142.
[92] Baillie, 'Introductory Discourse', p. 91.

stage body, as one that leads to altruism yet has an origin in a more morbid desire to understand the pain of others through personal experience.[93]

In this regard, the consumption of tragedy, or indeed of episodes of violence, becomes an act of displaced recognition, of projected anxiety that borders on voyeurism. As Baillie explains, if, when presented with the spectacle of 'person[s] under the pressure of great and uncommon calamity', we might decide to respectfully look away, 'the first glance we direct to [them] will involuntarily be one of the keenest observations'.[94] Inherent to this sympathetic process is the epistemic need to observe the workings of the passions on bodies, a theory not far removed from the qualities I identified as driving affect in chapter one. What is interesting about Baillie's project is that it shows how affect, if not exempt from the morbid curiosity of rediscovering the organic body, is difficult to align with actual sadism.[95] In the case of her *Plays*, for example, this enjoyment is clearly premised on moral grounds. The final goal of Baillie's project is thus to arrive at a strange intermingling of sympathy and didacticism, masqueraded perhaps through the spectacle of violence. Through the identification of the passions, particularly as they develop corporeally, we can engage in the potentially fatal conclusion of their excessive nature, rejoice in their fictional consequences, and mould our own lives accordingly. It is, therefore, important to see Baillie's fusion of voyeurism and tragic morality as a step towards the ambiguous fictional apparatus that would eventually allow for the production of films like *Saw*. Baillie's morality is grounded in the ambivalent pleasure found in watching pain.

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[93] Ibid., p. 69.
[94] Ibid., p. 72.
[95] This is a point I elaborate in relation to *Peeping Tom*, another affective corporeal text, in chapter three, section two.

Pleasure is encountered in the recognition of human potential immanent in suffering and not necessarily on the Sadean logic that inflicting pain is in itself gratifying. It is derived from recognition through vicarious sympathy for the figure of the tragic hero/ine. For Baillie, the moment of examination or dissection of the passions is one of return to either something familiar, recognisable or capable of establishing a sympathetic relationship. Hers is, in short, a protean apprehending of what I theorised in chapter one as horror's BwO: a form of return to an organic side of the body only accessible through affect. In Baillie's dramatic theory, the return is not to the BwO as such but to some form of proprioceptive sympathetic curiosity: recognition, or its potential, is channelled through the mind and filtered at a bodily level. It is precisely because of this that Baillie's work has been considered by scholars like Alan Richardson as an early 'holistic approach to mind-body relations' quite different from that of other Romantic writers.[96] According to him, Baillie's 'grounding of the mind in the body', the inception of 'embodied psychology', appears as a literary counterpart to 'the cutting edge of Romantic-era scientific and medical thought'.[97] In Baillie's writings, this epistemo-corporeal process originates within the continuum of audience-actor identification. If cinematic advances would problematise the mediation of such facile spectatorial constructions, particularly with regards to alignment, what is crucial to note is that Baillie did not perceive suffering as alien to the spectator. On the contrary, the spectacle of pain (whether psychological or physical) occurred on stage *as well as* in the spectatorial body, or, as she put it, '[w]ith limbs untorn, with head unsmitten, with sense unimpaired by despair, we know what

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[96] Alan Richardson, 'A Neural Theatre: Joanna Baillie's "Plays on the Passions", in *Joanna Baillie, Romantic Dramatist: Critical Essays*, ed. by Thomas C. Crochunis (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp.130-45.
[97] Ibid., pp. 132, 145. See also his *British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 93-150.

we ourselves might have been on the rack, on the scaffold'.[98] These ideas of interconnectedness, of one body appropriated visually by the spectator, are, as I have shown, intrinsically linked to the emergence of tragedy as a truly emotionally immersive dramatic genre. Due to its investment in 'battles, murders and disasters' as purporting to the feats of a particular nation, the trials and dangers to which the characters are subjected necessarily force the spectator to be part and parcel of the game of staged violence. I want to turn to *De Monfort* in the rest of this section to show how Baillie tried to bring this type of theatre-actor-spectator rapport onto the stage.

Baillie's Gothic plays, specifically *De Monfort* but also *The Family Legend* (1810), *Orra* (1812), and *Witchcraft* (1836), can be seen as pieces that re-establish an intrinsically British tragedy in the Shakespearean tradition through extensive recourse to Gothic imagery and affect.[99] *De Monfort*'s murder scene is set in a 'wild path in the wood, shaded with trees' and illuminated only by 'moonlight'.[100] Similarly, the fourth and fifth acts, the most tragic, take place in the 'almost dark' halls and cells of a German 'convent chapel of old Gothic architecture' (IV.ii, p.161) reminiscent of Gothic novels like Ann Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance* (1790) or *The Italian* (1797). Baillie's innovative use of lamps and what Paul Ranger has called 'localised lighting' are also at work in these scenes.[101] After one of the main characters quits the lugubrious stage amongst loud *'owl screams'* (IV.i, p. 160) and the ominous tolling of bells, *'two torches only are seen at a distance, burning over a new-made grave'* (IV.ii,

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[98] Baillie, 'Introductory Discourse', p. 74.

[99] For a brief discussion of Baillie's connection to the Gothic, see Christine A. Colón's introduction in Joanna Baillie, *Six Gothic Dramas* (Chicago: Valancourt, 2007), pp. xxii-xxiv. Bertrand Evans also devotes a whole chapter to Baillie in *Gothic Drama from Walpole to Shelley*, pp. 241-57.

[100] Joanna Baillie, *De Monfort*, in *Five Romantic Plays: 1768-1821*, ed. by Paul Baines and Edward Burns (Oxford: Oxford Univeristy Press, 2000), IV.i, p. 159. Further references to this edition will be given in the text parenthetically. Page numbers are provided for stage directions.

[101] Ranger, *'Terror and Pity'*, p. 100.

p. 161). An increasing storm 'howling along the cloisters' (IV.ii, 1-2) is soon mentioned by one of the figures, and this gloomy auditory experience is quickly augmented by the appearance of '*a large procession of Nuns, with the Abbess, bearing torches*' singing as they '*advance to the stage*' (p. 161). As we can see, setting is crucial in its creation of affect in the play's key scenes. In fact, Baillie has often been admired for what critics have seen as her capacity to improve 'the sense of three-dimensional realism in the theatre'.[102] This is also supported by the importance given to the mise-en-scène during the staging of *De Monfort* in Drury Lane in 1800. For its first performance, the theatre boasted a 'great Gothic stage' that 'represented a fourteenth-century church with nave, choir and side aisles in seven planes about 56 feet wide, 52 deep and 37 feet high'.[103] Even if the stage was not used to its full capacity (92 feet long, 83 feet wide), we can still imagine how the sheer dimensions of the scene would have been sufficient to create a sense of awe in the audience. But if Baillie was interested in utilising scenery, imagery, lighting and sounds to maximum affect, she was most preoccupied with how extreme gesticulations of melodramatic intensity might convey similar emotions.

At the end of the seventeenth century, strong emotions would be conveyed to the audience through the use of intense facial expression and body language.[104] The reason for this is that contemporary theatres were often very noisy and did not allow for fully intelligible acoustic experiences.[105] Catherine B. Burroughs argues that Baillie, influenced as she was by Shakespearean tragedy, championed a realist style of acting, inflected by physiognomy, that would use the body's expressive capacity to

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[102] Peter Duthie, 'Introduction', in *Plays on the Passions*, p. 45.
[103] Rosenfeld, *A Short History of Scene Design in Great Britain*, p. 98.
[104] Backscheider, *Spectacular Politics*, p. 176.
[105] Duthie, 'Introduction', p. 38.

transmit inner emotions to the viewer.[106] In fact, Baillie's interest in the possibilities of affective theatre went so far as to drive one of the most famous actors in her plays, Henry Siddons, to study the correlation between particular gestures and the desired responses on the audience, a practice which would be echoed later in Artaud's writings.[107] *De Monfort* is a good example of Baillie's project for it makes a very marked use of facial expressions to track the hero-villain's descent into blind hatred. When first introduced, De Monfort is characterised by his landlord as a 'quiet and lib'ral man' (I.i, 16), a 'comely gentleman' (98). However, as soon as his friend, the Count of Freberg, explains that he is meeting with his old nemesis, Rezenvelt, De Monfort's face turns 'pain-stricken' (I.ii, 112) and he looks 'offended' (113). As the action speeds towards its tragic climax, De Monfort's emotional turmoil is expressed physically. His entrance in act II sees him walking about '*with a disordered air, and his hand pressed against his forehead*' (II.ii, p. 131), and Act III finds him pacing slowly '*with his arms crossed, with a thoughtful frowning aspect*' (III.iii, p. 151). De Monfort's metamorphosis is also charted through the reactions of his friends and family, who can tell there is something amiss by merely looking at his body. His sister Jane, for example, asks him to confide his secrets to her after 'observ[ing] [his] restless eyes, and gait disturbed' (II.ii, 6). When he eventually does, hatred is equally externalised through Jane's request that he '[u]nknit [his] brows, and spread those wrath-clenched hands' (II.ii, 100). Such facial and physical articulations are emphasised greatly during the moments before and after the murder scene. As he restlessly waits for Rezenvelt in the woods, De Monfort is described as having '*a strong expression of disquiet, mixed with fear, upon his face*' (IV.i, p. 159), and when he is found by the monks, with bloody clothes and hands, '*his face is seen in all the*

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[106] Catherine B. Burroughs, *Closet Stages: Joanna Baillie and the Theatre Theory of British Romantic Women Writers* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), pp. 112-3.
[107] Ibid., p. 114.

strengthened horror of despair' (IV.iii, p. 165). Killing Rezenvelt does not ameliorate

his condition, and guilt transmogrifies his expression into one of sullen resignation. In

fact, as the corpse is unveiled, De Monfort is shown '*stand[ing] fixed and motionless*

in horror' (IV.iii, p. 166). These displays of anatomic detail, of the precise corporeal

impact of the passions in the body is what makes Baillie's theatre an important part of

this chapter's genealogy of affect in theatre.

In recent years the critical focus has shifted towards a fuller understanding of

this biological interest, particularly in relation to Matthew Baillie's treatises on

anatomy and neurology. Peter Duthie, for example, understands Baillie's stage to

'become[...] a literary likeness of an eighteenth-century surgical theatre in which she

makes the passions palpable and subject to physical inquiry'.[108] Baillie's work has

also been read not just as an example of how scientific and medical discourses were

mirrored in theatrical practices, but also of how such dramaturgic efforts might

constitute the consolidation of a secular theatre in line with Lewis's.[109] If morality is a

clear driving force in a play like *De Monfort*, the actual analysis of the on-stage body,

its careful spectatorial dissection, points towards the antiseptic and godless operating

tables of much contemporary horror. As I will argue in the third part of this thesis, the

'will to see' developed theoretically by critics like Linda Williams and evidenced in

films like *Saw* or *Hostel* originates in a similar preoccupation with the material quality

of corporeality. Duthie also finds remarkable that some of the most poetic passages in

Baillie's plays also appeal to 'a diversion-seeking audience [...] powerfully drawn to

the image'.[110] Along these lines, I would like to suggest that Baillie's conceptual

scaffold can be best epitomised as an early exploration of the need for a dramatic

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[108] Duthie, 'Introduction', p. 34,
[109] See Marjean D. Purinton, 'Theatricalized Bodies and Spirits: Techno-Gothic as Performance in Romantic Drama', *Gothic Studies* 3 (2001), 134-55.
[110] Ibid.

hybrid of intellectual pity and spectacle. This is relevant because Baillie's dramatic project developed at a time where advances in the world of visual illusion had radically changed the relationship between spectator and fiction. The dramas flowering in France at the time of Baillie's anatomical theatre show similarly carnal concerns. In the next section I analyse their violent spectacles to show how in the early twentieth century successful affective drama already depended on the realist and direct transmission of emotion through corporeal transgression. If Baillie's dramatic project established the possibility of a transmutation of emotions from performing to spectatorial bodies, the grand guignol helped consolidate it through its harnessing of a mainstream theatre of extreme violence.

Section 3. The French Theatre of Death

Realism and the Grand Guignol

The previous section concluded by locating the tragedies of Joanna Baillie within an anatomic discourse surrounding the dissection of human emotions. I have also read them as an extension of the secular displays of affect in Gothic plays like Lewis's *The Castle Spectre*. Both of these dramatic projects can be compared to that of the grand guignol genre, which, according to scholar Mel Gordon, is

> devoted to the visualization of a pitiless analysis and dissection of the elemental human emotions, but [...] mainly concerns itself with the psychology of fear, terror, horror, and the reaction of the human conscience and the human need to influence both real and imaginary, working in and through certain suggestive atmospheric environments and upon the retina of imagination. It absorbs the attention of the beholder utterly.[111]

It is, of course, possible to conceive of performance as always already intrinsically interested in transgressing limits, but the grand guignol has been perceived as a dramatic tradition that, whilst not unlike Greek tragedy in its intention to seek overwhelming intensity, takes the spectacle of violence to unique extremes of on-stage display.[112] What makes it particularly interesting to this genealogy of affect is the visceral exploitation of law and violence that has often led to the censoring of grand guignol plays and to their cultural depreciation.[113] As I have shown, emphasis on

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[111] Mel Gordon, *The Grand Guignol: Theatre of Fear and Terror* (New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 1988), p. 35.
[112] Clive Barker and Stephen Jones, *Clive Barker's A-Z of Horror* (London: BBC Books, 1997), pp. 109, 114.
[113] See Helen Freshwater, *Theatre Censorship in Britain* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 21.

emotion, mutilation and even the creation of fear or horror on the spectator are not necessarily innovative by 1896, the year normally associated with the start of the grand guignol. If the Gothic stage saw the beginning of a preoccupation with the staging of spectacle and showed an awareness of the connections between the body of the spectator and that of the actor, the grand guignol took this idea to the limit. It is no wonder, then, that it is popularly known as the 'theatre of horror', or that, according to Hand and Wilson, the phrase 'grand-guignolesque' has 'entered the language to describe displays of heightened, remorseless horror'.[114] This section expands the link between affect ('heightened horror') and grand guignol's corporeal investment through an exploration of its conventions, relation to audiences and reception. I then move on to consider Jean Aragny and Francis Neilson's *The Kiss of Blood* (1929) as an example of how a particular strand of grand guignol, 'medical theatre', worked to create extreme affect through the realistic staging of the operating theatre.[115]

One of the most obvious departures of the grand guignol with respect to the influential Gothic tradition was its initial turn to a very non-supernatural criminal world as a source of horror. Guilbert de Pixérécourt's melodramas, foundational to the grand guignol, betray a certain contemporary curiosity towards criminal behaviour that would only turn more explicit with the subsequent popularity of the *fait divers*, dramatic pieces that exploited sensational news from the yellow press.[116] This is interesting for the links it sets up between the tradition of exaggerated or 'extreme' naturalism within which the grand guignol seems to embed itself, and the secular spectacles of the Gothic stage that it sometimes echoes. In fact, as much as it borrows

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[114] Richard J. Hand and Michael Wilson, 'The Grand-Guignol: Aspects of Theory and Practice', *Theatre Research International*, 25 (2000), 266-75 (p. 266).
[115] References to plays are to their original French titles and performance dates at the stage of the grand guignol as given in Agnès Pierron, *Le Grand Guignol: Le Théâtre des peurs de la Belle Époque* (Paris: Bouquins, 1995). The titles are given in English where I draw on the available English translations.
[116] Gordon, *Grand Guignol*, p. 7.

Gothic imagery and plot lines (Edgar Allan Poe in Georges Maurevert's *Le Coeur révélateur* [1900] and German expressionism in André de Lorde and Henri Bauche's *Le Cabinet du Dr Caligari* [1925]) the grand guignol began as an offshoot of the Théâtre Libre popularised by André Antoine. The Théâtre Libre was in itself very much influenced by Emile Zola's conception of drama as a scientific representation of society, and this preoccupation with what would be termed 'sordid realism' is perhaps what gained the plays social opprobium.[117] The further development of the *rosse*, or 'crass' plays, especially those written by Oscar Méténier, also erred on the side of extreme realism in their documentary portrayal of the low-life Parisian underworld and can be seen as an important stage in the development of what would go on to become the cinéma vérité.[118] They are also vital to my study of the art of affect through mutilation, particularly after Max Maurey established the 'theatre of fear' upon becoming director in 1899. Not only does the grand guignol establish a very clear preoccupation with secular violence, particularly corporeal transgression, but it also constitutes a further performative example of how the staging of affective actions would rely on believable, albeit histrionic, scenes of everyday violence. If the grand guignol was not always absolutely driven by the need to shock – comedies used to sandwich the 'rosses' – it prefigures the popular horror films that would eventually prove too much competition.[119]

Mel Gordon has suggested that we understand the grand guignol as the most Aristotelian form of twentieth-century drama in its generation of fear and pity, and explains that modern critics have seen these plays as spaces where spectators may

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[117] Ibid., pp. 8-9.
[118] Ibid., p. 10.
[119] Ibid., p. 17.

'play out' their 'fantasies of victimization and retribution'.[120] Hand and Wilson, who have written extensively on the genre's reception over the years, have proposed that affect is not always necessarily generated through violence. Following Michel Corvin's influential article 'Une dramaturgie de la parole' (1998), Hand and Wilson suggest that 'the use of dramatic irony and recognizable narrative structures' that allows the audience to anticipate what is going to happen has equal weight in setting up a grand guignolesque atmosphere or 'ambiance'.[121] Thus, a piece like Maurice Level's *Le Baiser dans la nuit* (1912), where a man takes revenge after a vitriolic attack, relies just as much on the final retributive disfigurement of his wife as it does on the dramatic build-up and tension that leads to the inevitable denouement. Hand and Wilson have also emphasised the importance of lighting and shadows, as well as positioning and synchronised acting, in order to achieve scenes of intense affect.[122] This is of particular importance when considering the theatre of the grand guignol: a small stage and an equally small space for the stalls ensured the action remained intimate. The obvious problematic corollary was that if lightning, acting or sound were played ineffectively, the performance could easily morph into farce. The correct and affective use of the mise-en-scène would become crucial for a successful performance and, in an echo of Greek tragedy, sometimes narration of grisly events would attempt to have the same impact. For example, in Henri-René's *La Folie blanche* (1905), a play about a group of climbers in danger, the cutting of the rope that sends one of the characters to his death is not shown but described by someone observing the action through a telescope. Similarly, in the immensely successful *Au Téléphone* (Charles Foleÿ and André de Lorde, 1922), the slaughter of Marex's family

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[120] Ibid., pp. 2, 18.
[121] Hand and Wilson, 'Aspects of Theory and Practice', p. 270; Hand and Wilson, *Grand-Guignol*, p. 50.
[122] Richard J. Hand and Michael Wilson, *Grand-Guignol: The French Theatre of Horror* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002), p. 9.

takes place completely off stage as he listens helplessly from the phone in a friend's house.[123] Affect in such cases is created entirely through sound and very controlled, focussed performances.

Contemporaneous cartoons and reviews also helped emphasise the affective qualities of the grand guignol and to predispose audiences to visceral reactions.[124] Rumours of frequent fainting in the theatre led to the constant presence of doctors during performances, which itself created social awareness of these spectacles in the media. For example, an often-anthologised cartoon shows three grand guignoleurs awaiting a medical check-up before they are allowed into the premises. If some have challenged the actual need for such paramedic back-up – the doctors may equally have been a commercial prop encouraged by director Max Maurey, who clearly believed in the genre's capacity to elicit physical responses – it is equally plausible that people did faint.[125] In fact, the logical implication of the need to stage medical concern goes beyond the actual presence of doctors in the premises. It proves that, at least in the social unconscious, the Théâtre Libre had morphed into a 'Theatre of Horror' aimed at affecting spectators through corporeal transgression. This is particularly relevant to my argument here, for as Hand and Wilson have noted, 'such stunts break down the border between art and life [...]. By employing a doctor, Maurey told the Grand-Guignol audience that there was the potential of *real* danger'.[126] Recent research in this area has also shown that fainting itself can be seen as an act of physical participation, 'bordering on the collaborative, the conspiratorial and indeed

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[123] Staged in the Antoine Theatre in Paris in 1901.
[124] The extent to which suggestion is important to the grand guignol cannot be sufficiently emphasised. Some critics report that, during stagings of the medical plays, members of the audience would claim to smell ether even when none had been used. See František Deák, 'Théâtre du Grand Guignol', *The Drama Review*, 18, 1 (1974): 34-43 (p. 42).
[125] Gordon, *Grand Guignol*, p. 19.
[126] Hand and Wilson, *Grand-Guignol*, p. 72.

encourage[ing] thought about synchronicity of response'.[127] These boundaries between looking and participating in the act of violence can be seen in action in the only surviving piece of recorded grand guignol in the documentary film *This Shocking World/Ecco* (Gianni Proia, 1964). In it, a madman is about to dismember a woman on stage in a scene that, not surprisingly, looks similar to the Japanese faux snuff *Ginî piggu 2*. It is revealing that he turns back before the initial incision to offer what Hand and Wilson describe as a 'a look of invitation, even collusion'.[128]

This nod to the audience, a moment that will become particularly relevant in my discussions of self-reflexivity in torture porn and faux-snuff, reflects a purpose easily identifiable in the work of the genre's celebrated directors and playwrights. For example, André de Lorde, who had the highest number of staged grand guignol plays and was deemed 'the prince of terror', actively spoke of his affective intentions. Like Artaud, he was given to the writing of introductions on both the methodology and the appeal of a 'theatre of horror' and 'death', as he variously termed his own plays.[129] It is often noted that his main authorial aspiration was to create such an affective piece that corporeal revulsion would overtake viewers completely. The popular conception is that 'de Lorde wanted to create one of Poe's dreams: to write a play so terrifying and unbearable that several minutes after the curtain rises, the entire audience would flee from the theatre en masse'.[130] In fact, De Lorde would go on to clarify later that, if his intention was to create such a dramatic piece, he differed from Poe in that he wanted to turn plays into successful and well-attended events.[131] In the introduction to his 1927 anthology *Masters of Fear*, he already expressed the need for this formula to

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[127] Karen Quigley, 'Theatre on Call: Participatory Fainting and Grand-Guignol Theatre', *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts*, 16, 3 (2011): 105-7 (p. 107).
[128] Hand and Wilson, *Grand-Guignol*, p. 36.
[129] Gordon, *Grand Guignol*, p. 21.
[130] Ibid., p. 22.
[131] André de Lorde, *Théâtre d'Épouvante*, 20th edn (Paris: Librairie Théâtrale, Artistique & Littéraire 1909), pp. xviii, xxv.

gain notoriety and remain as influential as that of realistic theatre. Part of his reasoning was that the stage needed to apprehend the affective potential exploited by the theatre of fear:

> This formula [...] will have contributed to the introduction of some felicitous changes to theatre generally: simple unmediated action, and the precise, almost scientific, studies of social milieus so far neglected by dramatists [...], the staging of physiological and medical case studies as frequently as the staging of internalized problems or examples of spiritual conflict.[132]

'Rapidity', 'simplicity', 'originality' as well as succinctness and a dramatic style that concentrates on action and not pity, are all necessary to create perfect 'pills of terror'.[133] If Baillie was interested in dissecting the emotions as they surface on the body, the grand guignol emphasises the 'material life', the tragedy of the 'destructive forces of our organisms'.[134] This is possible because the feeling of fear is composed of both intellectual and physical elements, but, most importantly, because it includes an affective component that triggers the connection between both.[135]

De Lorde's passion for a theatre of affect shows the relevant passage from a stage that was mainly preoccupied with portraying 'raw' realism to one that sought realistic 'rawness' in its use of fear: the focus shifted to the actual capacity to have a direct impact on audiences. This is of particular relevance to one of my overarching arguments in this thesis, namely that representations of violence always necessarily depend on their cultural and historical context or, in other words, that what is visible

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[132] André de Lorde, quoted in Victor Emeljanov, 'Grand Guignol and the Orchestration of Violence', in *Violence in Drama: Themes in Drama, vol. 13*, ed. by James Redmond (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 151-63 (p. 155).
[133] De Lorde, *Théâtre d'Épouvante*, p. xviii; De Lorde, *Théâtre de la Mort*, p. 13.
[134] De Lorde, *Théâtre de la Mort*, p. 19.
[135] Ibid., p. 24.

(what can be represented on stage, page or screen) depends on both what is culturally acceptable and what can be realistically portrayed through technology or special effects. In this respect, it should not come as a surprise that the grand guignol's golden age came right after the First World War.[136] Reports on life in the trenches, as well as, particularly in Britain, the crudeness with which warfare was sometimes represented in the poetry and diaries of soldiers, created a social need for a much more hands-on approach to the portrayal of violence. When the horror of reality out-grossed fiction, the grand guignol simply assimilated it and recycled it for spectatorial affect. Camille Choisy, the man who took over the guignol theatre after Maurey's retirement, saw the incursion of the atrocities of war as fodder for further macabre performances. After World War II, the thirst for realism transmogrified into the morbid curiosity for plays that purported to perform Nazi-related massacres or tortures, and the guignol's biggest competition came from cinemas that showed actual footage of death camps or medical experiments.[137] The previous importance of stage devices of mutilation became the *raison d'être* of such a theatre, and successful performances relied as much on the tense portrayal of characters as they did on the correct implementation of intricate contraptions, bodily prostheses and blood-splattering instruments.

As we can see, the staging of corporeal transgression is one of the trademarks of the guignol, and its repertoire can boast the most inventive catalogue of mutilation in any modern theatre tradition. Since the first on-stage death by hanging in Jean Berleux's *Carrier, Horloger-Bijoutier* (1901), the theatre in the rue Chaptal saw all manner of bodily assault: a character has his hands amputated *Titus*-style in *La Dernière Torture* (André de Lorde and Eugène Morel, 1904), another dies in the guillotine in the controversial *Au Petit Jour* (André de Lorde and Jean Bernac, 1921)

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[136] Deák, 'Théâtre du Grand Guignol', p. 38.
[137] Ibid., p. 31.

and strips of flesh are torn from an actress's back in *Le Jardin des supplices* (Pierre Chaine and André de Lorde, 1922). The complexity of some of the more violent scenes in the grand guignol is also well documented. *The Nutcracker Suite* (Eliot Crawshaw-Williams, 1924), for example, required the room's ceiling to descend over the actors. This effect was so difficult to recreate convincingly that directors would end up using the curtain as a substitute for the crushing wall.[138] However, most of the time the tricks used in the climactic scenes were incredibly simple to stage and, in some cases, like the famous chewed bar of soap in the mouth to create the illusion of foaming madness, even harked back to medieval theatre.[139] Retractable blades with hidden chambers full of blood substitutes would congeal and look like wounds and scabs, special make-up would make a face appear as if it had been eaten by vitriol, complex structures made with resistant belts would ensure that a hanging looked convincing, systems of mirrors and many other ingenious devices would help feign corporeal attack under a given light. In the struggle for realism and impact, slaughterhouses sometimes became the stage's best friends: real blood from dead cattle was used in the early days, and the last director of the grand guignol, Charles Nonon, sourced his eyeballs from taxidermists, 'not only for visual realism, when characters eyes' were gouged out, but for the organ's ability to bounce when they hit the stage floor'.[140]

Corporeal transgression is the main means of affect generation in the grand guignol. I have shown how its particular vision of theatre seeks to reshape the medium through the incorporation of revolutionary affective techniques that include anything from simple illusions to elaborate staged deaths. To illustrate these I turn to a well-

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[138] Richard J. Hand and Michael Wilson, *London's Grand Guignol* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007), p. 199.
[139] John M. Callahan, 'The Ultimate in Theatre Violence', in *Violence in Drama*, pp. 165-75, (p. 174).
[140] Gordon, *Grand Guignol*, p. 47.

known and often performed piece of 'medical theatre' that caused much controversy

for its introduction of a full operating theatre on stage: *The Kiss of Blood*.

Medical Theatre, Surgical Affect and *The Kiss of Blood*

Madness and science are the staples of the grand guignol. If this theatre tradition, as I

have explained, can be said to have developed from the *fait divers* and was built on

the success of early plays about sordid low-living murderers such as Oscar Méténier's

Lui! (1897), it is best remembered for the scientific nightmares of plays like

L'Horrible Expérience (André de Lorde and Alfred Binet, 1909), *L'Homme qui a tué

la mort* (René Berton, 1928) or *Le Laboratoire des Hallucinations* (André de Lorde,

1916). More importantly, the plays of André de Lorde looked primarily to medicine,

science and madness for sources of horror. The playwright's obsession with science as

filtered through the Gothic tradition, particularly Edgar Allan Poe, is evident in his

emblematic adaptation of 'The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether' (1845)

and quickly earned his work the label 'medical theatre'.[141] Although the label is

convenient, and many of the grand guignol settings are indeed asylums, clinics or

surgery parlours, de Lorde's treatment of medical themes is extremely varied. It is

thus that 'medical theatre' may encompass anything from fierce social critiques of

hospital practices and incompetent alienists like *L'Obsession ou les deux forces* (with

Alfred Binet and Max Maurey, 1905), *Une leçon à la Salpêtrière* (1908) or *L'Homme

mystérieux* (with Alfred Binet, 1910), to the more complex use of madmen as the

springboard for extreme violence in plays such as *Crime dans un maison de fous, ou

Les Infernales* (1925). The latter features three women who, traumatised by the early

death of their daughters, sublimate their frustration by blinding and killing a young

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[141] Agnès Pierron, *Les Nuits Blanches du Grand-Guignol* (Paris: Seuil, 2002), p. 70.

girl. If Christopher Holland's expurgated adaptation for the London stage in 1921, retitled *The Old Women*, omitted its memorable eye-gouging scene, the play's use of graphic images is markedly different from the rather soberer and less sensationalist use of violence in *L'Obsession*, where the killings take place off stage.

One of the plays to make the most of this medical tradition was Jean Aragny and Francis Neilson's *The Kiss of Blood*.[142] I turn to it in the remainder of this section because, if not as emblematic as *Les Infernales* or *Le système du docteur Goudron et du professeur Plume* (André de Lorde and Maurice Tourneur, 1903), it is characteristic of the bloody excesses of the grand guignol and still stands as the best example of affective medical theatre. It also showcases what I am terming 'surgical affect', or the type of corporeal affect initiated through an encounter with images of surgical mutilation. If not entirely conventional in that the three instances of separate violence which sustain the action do not follow the more common pattern of a slow build-up followed by a gory 'climactic finale', the play's capacity to elicit fear and disturb audiences is exemplary of the grand guignol.[143] In fact, its premiere allegedly saw fifteen members of the audience leave the room and the on-site doctor was forced to ask for medical back-up.[144] Aragny and Neilson wrote in *The Kiss of Blood* a piece that would update medical theatre and take it into new spheres of terror without altering the grand guignol formula excessively.[145] The play makes full use of actual medical utensils and an operational mise-en-scène that, when first performed, required eleven men to make it run smoothly and was described by newspaper reviews as 'a

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[142] *Un baiser de sang* in the original French. Since I am following Hand and Wilson's word-for-word translation (*Grand-Guignol*, pp. 248-64) in this chapter, further references will be made using the English title and text.
[143] Hand and Wilson, *Grand-Guignol*, p. 244.
[144] André Antoine, *L'Information*, 9 March 1929, quoted in Agnès Pierron, *Grand Guignol*, p. 1113.
[145] As Hand and Wilson explain, *The Kiss of Blood* is 'a horror play but is never far from the world of farce' (*Grand-Guignol*, p. 247)

luxury'.[146] If similar surgical settings had been in use for plays like Élie de Basan's *Les operations du professeur Verdier* (1907), a comedy about a surgeon bent on finding a valuable pair of forceps lost inside one of his patients, *The Kiss of Blood* would become the first dramatic instance of an operating theatre being replicated in toto for the purpose of encasing the very visceral horrors of surgery. In other words, the play signals the moment when grand guignol's medical theatre turns to surgical corporeal nightmares to create affect.

Such a move is evident in the play's opening. The setting, '*the operating theatre at Professor Leduc's clinic*', is '*tiled and painted white*' and the furniture is equally '*chrome or painted in a white metallic colour*'.[147] Needless to say, this antiseptic whiteness enhances the red of the blood that eventually stains it, but it also allows for the various cabinets that '*contain the sorts of surgical equipment commonly found in hospitals*' (p. 248) to come into focus. The patient, who is lying down on '*a high operating table*' in what is described as '*an emergency case, under chloroform, of trepanation*', is '*covered by a sheet from his belly down to his knees*' and has his legs wrapped in cotton wool, the best to parade the '*flaps of skin [...] clipped back*' on the exposed '*frontal bone of the skull*' (p. 248). To guarantee that the focus of the scene remains the colourful head of the patient, Professor Leduc, his assistant Volguine and the male nurses are all '*dressed head to foot in white*', wear '*tight-fitting white cotton cap[s]*' and '*white cotton overshoes*' (pp. 248-9). '*[S]urgical masks*' (p. 248) cover their noses and mouth so that any potential expressions that might deflect from those of the suffering man are duly concealed. If a photograph from a 1937 performance is indicative of the staging of this scene, it is also safe to assume that the

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convenient positioning of the Professor directly to the patient's left encourages a full, unobscured view of the trepanation.[148] Last but not least, the surgeon's cap is equipped with an '*electric lamp – the sort which focuses its beam on the area to be operated upon*' (p. 249), a lighting effect that would force the audience to concentrate their attention on the patient's face.

That affect is crucial to this scene is, as we can see, evident from a close reading of the stage directions provided, but it is also achieved through the fact that the patient's face is used as a means of tracking the impact of the surgery on his body. The nameless man is described as '*being in pain, in spite of the chloroform*' and as '*crying out from time to time*', and when the Professor starts drilling a hole in his skull, he is meant to '*stir*' and '*groan[...] almost silently*' (p. 249). This illusion is strengthened through the typical grand guignolesque use of suggestive dialogue that announces, and therefore prepares the audience for, an intense and graphic moment. In fact, the Professor's interjection already seems to announce a possible fatality: 'it's no good. It's not going to work. The lesion means that I'm going to have to drill here... and not here after all... There's no alternative' (p. 249). This is quickly followed by a concerned assistant pointing out that 'that' happens to be 'the most resistant spot' and by his rather ill-fated reply, 'I hope that he's not going to gives us any trouble with his circulation like the Dutchman the other day' (p. 249). All of this prepares the public for the man's death only seconds later.

The visceral opening of *The Kiss of Blood* is crucial because it exemplifies how affect is constructed through garments, positioning, lighting or spectatorial helplessness, but has little narrative significance for the rest of the play. It is not surprising, then, that its apparently inconsequential nature was initially perceived, like

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[148] Pierron, *Grand Guignol*, photographic insets, p. 3.

much of the twentieth and twenty-first century visceral horror it prefigures, as unnecessarily explicit or gratuitous. But, as is usually the case with texts which make extensive use of mutilation or graphic images for affective purposes, what are initially perceived as flaws in the dramatic narrative may be recuperated retrospectively for their potential cinematic or affective mastery. For example, the complaints raised by detractors of the original performance of *The Kiss of Blood* reveal the general traits that would make the grand guignol such an influential genre:

> I find it impossible to accept 'physical horror' without any other motivation than that of exacerbating the nerves of the public. To show surgery on the stage, and elaborate on the lavish display of blood, dismembered limbs, etc., in what is, for that matter, little more than an implausible and insignificant dramatic action, is to reduce drama to the level of the most revolting spectacle. It is plain to see that, in writing *The Kiss of Blood*, Jean Aragny and Francis Neilson were not primarily concerned with the nature of tragedy, instead, they chose to 'terrify' the spectator by means of what is shown.[149]

What this particular reviewer found upsetting could be broadly defined as the piece's affective quality, or its capacity to 'terrify' the audience through the transgressed body on stage. That such a type of horror is being deemed 'physical' establishes my point in this section more generally, that is, that grand guignol is a significant precursor of contemporary horror cinema in its foregrounding of affect through the display of mutilation or torture. *The Kiss of Blood* is exceptional in this respect because it provides a perfect example of a play that is simultaneously psychological and physical. If reviewers felt that the clinical detail trivialised or simplified the tragic

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[149] Émile Mas, *Petit-Bleu*, 8 March 1929, quoted in Agnès Pierron, *Grand-Guignol*, p. 1113. My translation.

form, this is probably because tragedy is often associated with sober acting and emotional restraint. Instead the grand guignol, and *The Kiss of Blood* more specifically, is remarkable for its ability to merge the tragic with the melodramatic.

As soon as the death of the patient on the operating table is recorded, a young man called Joubert storms into the operating theatre. The remainder of the play circles around his incapacity to overcome the death of his wife Hélène, and produces two more instances of mutilation. Joubert, who shot his wife out of jealousy, is now being visited by her vicious ghost. In a bloody exaction of revenge, the apparition demands that Joubert amputate the finger that pressed the trigger. To ensure that this instance of self-harm will be carried out the ghost gives him the 'kiss of blood', after which Joubert develops a chronic pain that can only be relieved through excision of the affected part. Seeking professional help, the man asks Professor Leduc to operate on him immediately. After pointing out that Joubert might be psychologically unstable, the Professor is forced to cooperate when Joubert threatens to perform the surgical procedure himself. A tense moment occurs when Joubert initially refuses to be put under anaesthetic, but after the doctor's persuasive claim that he might otherwise not be 'completely still' (p. 255), the man complies with his wishes. The Professor's real purpose is then revealed: 'to fake the operation' (p. 256). This is a revealing moment in the play, not only because the rest of the action will hinge upon Joubert's disappointment with the medical profession, but also because it offers an excellent instant of metatheatrical commentary. Explaining that abundant blood will be necessary to make 'the illusion' of an amputated finger 'complete' (p. 256), the Professor and his assistant proceed to strap the finger to the man's palm. Rather predictably, Joubert's pain does not disappear and, realising he has been fooled, the crazed man *grabs a scalpel and begins to viciously cut through his finger* until it is

'horrifically mutilated' and, in the doctor's words, 'quite beyond saving' (p. 257). This second moment of surgical affect can only be compared with the even more brutal finale. The ghost, her wrath unabated by the savage self-mutilation, reappears to claim 'the hand that held the gun' (p. 263), and, in what seems a challenging stage direction in the style of *Titus*, Joubert is required to take '*the axe from the fireplace and hack*[...] *his hand off at the wrist*' (p. 264). In an on-line clip that shows a photograph of this particular moment, the axe has been replaced by a dagger, but the positioning of the actor would seem to demonstrate the importance of conveying this scene in all its possible realism.[150] The impact of this last mutilation scene is increased by the fact that the audience learns, almost simultaneously, that Hélène survived the shooting and has pretended to be a ghost.

It is important to analyse the relevance of this non-supernatural decision on the part of Aragny and Neilson, as it is more widely applicable to the grand guignol tradition and even to dramatic affect more generally. The play is deliberately ambiguous in its treatment of the revelation of Hélène's physicality. Whilst it is clear that she is consciously punishing her husband for his murder attempt, it is hinted that the attack might have driven her mad and caused her self-delusional ghostly existence. When she claims that her 'face is nothing but an open wound', what hides under the veil turns out to be not the image of abjection she had previously announced, but a 'face [...] undamaged', 'with mad eyes' (p. 263). This belief in a reality that has no actual empiric correlation could mean that, as far as she is concerned, she is indeed a ghost. However, if Hélène's thirst for retribution renders her phantasmatic to her own eyes, her corporeal presence is instantiated through Professor Leduc and Volguine's reactions, whose appearances in this scene are accessory. Rather than add anything

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[150] Interview with Mel Gordon, in *The Midnight Archive: The Grand Guignol*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JS7rykF5bOg> [accessed February 2012].

significant to the narrative, their witnessing of Hélène's revenge merely aids in the dissipation of the apparition, who suddenly becomes extremely carnal. The supernatural is, in the tradition of Ann Radcliffe's Gothic, explained away and revealed to be perfunctory: Hélène escaped the hospital and has since, one assumes, been hiding in Joubert's house. In this respect, the text remains anchored in a secular and godless world, as is common of the other plays in the repertoire. This is not because the grand guignol is an amoral type of drama, but rather, as Hand and Wilson have explained, because its universe is one 'where there is not justice but definitely retribution, albeit far from divine'.[151] Hélène's revenge in *The Kiss of Blood* summarises this erratic moral: her secular avenging fury establishes retribution precisely by subverting belief in the afterlife.

Religion is rarely, if ever, portrayed favourably in the grand guignol, and fanaticism or strong beliefs are generally linked to outrageous acts of violence. In Paul Autier and Paul Cloquemin's *Gardiens de phare* (1905), God is constantly invoked by the father of the ailing Yvon, who believes that divine justice will save the pure of spirit.[152] In a vicious turn of events, Bréhan is actually forced to kill his own son after the bout of rabies Yvon suffers turns him into an irrational and furious animal. Even the London grand guignol, heavily censored and monitored by the Lord Chamberlain, showed a similar inclination to the ambiguous, when not downright damning, depiction of the faithful. In Reginald Berkeley's *Eight O'Clock* (1920) the condemned prisoner tells a committed chaplain that he does not understand why he is being hanged for murder if all he did was fulfil 'Gawd's purpose'.[153] Similarly, the real danger in Victor MacClure's *Latitude 15° South* (1921) is not the feared Flying

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[151] Hand and Wilson, 'Aspects of Theory and Practice', p. 272.
[152] Hand and Wilson, *Grand-Guignol*, p. 113.
[153] Reginald Berkeley, *Eight O'clock*, in Hand and Wilson, *London's Grand Guignol*, pp. 94-107 (p. 100).

Dutchman, which turns out to be a mere bell-buoy, but the fanatic Farquhar, who kills another crew member for refusing to repent his sins. This secularised world is crucial, as I have argued, to the strand of corporeal horror I am considering in this thesis: it featured heavily in plays like *The Bacchae* or *Titus*, and will resurface in my study of torture porn and faux snuff. If horror is to be created corporeally, belief in the afterworld must be denied, for only that way can the pain of existence be visited with utmost violence upon the body. *The Kiss of Blood* ends in such a carnihilistic and violent note. Hélène has been revenged, but her manic cackling suggests total insanity, and Joubert has found relief to his pain but will perhaps bleed to death as a consequence. This contradictory moment of tension released through calamity will echo in later screenings of corporeal transgression. As I shall prove, Joubert's last words, 'no more pain! No more pain!' (p. 264), resonate beyond the play's intradiegesis. Dramatic resolution is found in the realisation that the moment of horror has been successfully achieved, consumed, and overcome. In the deft portrayal of spectatorial affect, there is only one other movement that can rival the grand guignol in its exploitation of corporeality. Its origin is also French.

Section 4. Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty

'I would not shrink from violence, but I want such violence to yield results'.[154]

This chapter on on-stage affect would not be complete without a cursory look at the practices of a theatre critic, director, actor and playwright who, although he never declared allegiance to de Lorde or Aragny, has much in common with the authors of plays like *The Kiss of Blood*. Antonin Artaud, whose championing of physical and visual forms of acting have been 'central' to 'the development of twentieth-century performance', wrote very specifically about dramatic affect.[155] His ideas about the theatre of cruelty have proven just as influential in later developments of corporeal transgression as the grand guignol. If the latter was concerned with exploring the limits of dramatic horror as an affective event, Artaud's theatre wished to shock the body into a new metaphysical state.[156] Whilst both genres are manifestly different, particularly in execution and influences, they share a number of preoccupations that have gone largely unnoticed. The pejorative rhetoric that associates sensationalism with low-art and the avant-garde with high art has, instead, promoted the perception of these forms of theatre as dissimilar in terms of historical and cultural relevance. Artaud's dramatic experiment, which failed after the disappointment of *The Cenci* (1935), has been the subject of numerous publications in praise of its attempt to modernise theatre, and has often been connected to movements like the theatre of the

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[154] Antonin Artaud, *The Cenci*, in *Collected Works: Volume 4*, trans. by Victor Corti (London: Calder and Boyars: 1974), III.i, p. 141.
[155] Paul Allain and Jen Harvey, *The Routledge Companion to Theatre and Performance Studies* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 17.
[156] Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, trans. by Victor Corti (Richmond: Oneworld Classics, 2011), p. 31.

absurd and surrealism.[157] The grand guignol, which boasted a healthy and prolonged

stage life, with over sixty years of nearly uninterrupted performances, has only

recently elicited interest and is still seen, unfairly, as a minor genre. However, a closer

look reveals a very different reality: both the grand guignol and the theatre of cruelty

aimed to be popular – Artaud's project famously tried to captivate the masses; both

tried to revolutionise the relationship between stage and audience; and relied heavily

on affect. I have discussed the means by which the guignol brought forward its

particular conception of dramatic impact in the previous section of this chapter. By

turning to Artaud I intend to further this discussion on stage affect and show how

literary forms of theatre can be equally concerned with the overarching project of

creating the ultimate affective play. Artaud's theatre is also intimately connected to

the works of the marquis de Sade, which inform part of my discussion in the third

chapter of this study. In that respect, Artaud's theatre bridges the gap between

performance studies and cinema, as he developed both according to similar affective

ends.

Artaud's theatre of cruelty was a short-lived affair and, therefore, a lot of his

ideas have resonated with later playwrights and directors through his various articles

on the subject. His dramatic manifesto, offered in two parts in his *The Theatre and Its

Double* (1938), reads like a direct transferral to the stage of my reading of Horror's

BwO in chapter one, mainly because his prefiguration of a type of theatre that would

challenge the physical and not the psychological originates from a similarly organic

apprehension of the body. As he put it, 'one cannot separate body and mind, nor the

sense from the intellect, particularly in a field where the unendingly repeated jading of

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[157] See Alain and Odette Virmaux, *Artaud: Un bilan critique* (Pierre Belfond, Paris, 1979), pp. 32-50. *Les Cenci* in the original French. I adopt the English title throughout to signal that I am using the translated text and not the original text.

our organs calls for sudden shocks to revive our understanding'.[158] If such a theatre was not always bloody, or at least not as systematically so as the grand guignol, it did intend to 'return to all the tried-and-tested magic means of affecting sensitivity'; it wanted to make metaphysics 'enter the mind through the body'.[159] Corporeal transgression would speak directly to the nerves and the physiological through the exploitation of 'differing intensities of colour, light or sound' or the use of discordant 'vibrations and tremors, musical, rhythmic repetition or the repetition of spoken phrases'.[160] Without relying purely on blood and gore, the theatre of cruelty aspired to create a form of 'consciousness which illuminates life in a display of its essential carnage'.[161] Such ideas are manifest in the incomplete writings for *La Conquête du Mexique* (1933), which was planned to become the company's first production. This scenario shows that the focus of the theatre of cruelty was not violence per se, although it was important too, but also a certain overwhelming confusion of the senses. A huge numbers of actors would people the stage, all performing different actions simultaneously and ensuring that the play 'would stage events rather than men'.[162] Sensations of heat, cold or claustrophobia would be produced through special lighting, colours or an austere *mise-en-scène*. The positioning of the audience would also be crucial in obtaining the desired effect: theatre-goers would not be sitting down, but rather inhabiting the theatrical space as bodies to be played and engaged with. This would guarantee that a '[d]irect contact [was] established between the audience and the show'.[163]

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[158] Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, p. 62.
[159] Ibid., p. 90.
[160] Ibid.
[161] Julia F. Costich, *Antonin Artaud* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978), p. 46.
[162] Ibid., p. 91.
[163] Ibid., p. 68.

Artaud's project to reanimate theatre starts, as we can see, by rethinking its relation to the spectator, but also by refusing the stasis and conformism of contemporary Western drama. According to him, the idolatry and economic basis of culture is to blame for the loss of theatre as an organic, social form of power that could have a real transformative impact on audiences.[164] Taking his cues from Oriental drama, particularly Balinese theatre and its emphasis on 'hallucination and terror', Artaud launched a complete transvaluation of the form that would reintroduce the body and act as a form of plague on the spectator.[165] This corporeal transmission would shake the audience out of the coma brought about by years of reactionary theatre, and it would do so through a reactivation of the relationship between the senses and the mind. Such a radical position relied as heavily on a reconceptualisation of space and action as it did on the implementation of new performing techniques.

In order to have a direct impact on the audience, actors had to be able to project feelings in a manner different to melodrama and its emphasis on two-dimensional theatre. The interaction between actor and spectator aimed to be symbiotic, something which makes a new corporeal language necessary. Since, for Artaud, '[e]very emotion has an organic basis', the actor, with his own body and perceiving the audience as a double, had to develop expert control of it 'to know where *to affect [the audience]*'.[166] This almost mystic or alchemical understanding of theatre was compared by Artaud to Chinese medicine, for it searches for 'the sensitive points governing even the subtlest faculties over the whole extent of human anatomy' in order to create a space where 'the mind can be reached through the organs'.[167] What

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[164] Ibid., p. 5.
[165] Ibid., p. 38.
[166] Ibid., pp. 99, 98.
[167] Artaud, 'Documents Relating to *The Theatre and Its Double*', in *Collected Works: Volume 4*, pp. 182-3.

is interesting about such a 'show aimed at the whole anatomy' is that it is premised on a very Deleuzian holistic model where the mind and the body are ultimately part of the same continuum, and where the moment of affect liberates the BwO.[168] For Artaud, the poetry to be found in such a new theatrical form creates 'symbols of full-blown powers held in bondage until that moment and unusable in real life, exploding in the guise of incredible images giving existence and the freedom of the city to acts naturally opposed to social life'.[169] The Deleuzian socius is left behind, at least during the performance, and the stage is capable of 'disturb[ing] our peace of mind, releas[ing] our repressed subconscious, driv[ing] us to a kind of potential rebellion'.[170] According to Artaud, what such a process involves is a type of revelation that 'urg[es] forwards the exteriorization of a latent undercurrent of cruelty through which all the perversity of which the mind is capable'.[171] If this rebellious catharsis does not necessarily entail an encounter with the organic body per se, rather what he calls the unconscious, we can see how such theorisations anticipate my reading of the moment of affect as a return to the BwO in its full potential, particularly in Artaud's championing of 'a physical language, aimed at the senses and independent of speech'.[172] As has been suggested, the fact that the acting practices are 'minimally articulated' in his articles, means that we rely on his literature for a semblance of the dramatic specificities of the theatre of cruelty.[173] Having considered Artaud's theoretical propositions, I want to briefly assess their actual application on the stage by analysing corporeal affect in his most famous play, *The Cenci*. Since Artaud clearly favoured physical re/action over verbose or wordy passages, stage directions

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[168] Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, p. 62. It is obviously no coincidence that the BwO was borrowed from Artaud's own 'To Be Done with the Judgement of God', a radio play from 1949.
[169] Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, p. 18.
[170] Ibid.
[171] Ibid., p. 20.
[172] Ibid., p. 26.
[173] Allain and Harvey, *The Routledge Companion to Theatre and Performance Studies*, p. 17.

are of particular value to my study. I therefore concentrate here on the profusion and possible intentions of exploitative noises (auditory violence) and mutilation (corporeal violence).

Artaud's last production to see the light of day, a forerunner to the theatre of cruelty's intended original programme, was *The Cenci*, which ran for seventeen nights but failed to create much of a stir. Whilst it was not necessarily received with hostility, the play was considered a failure, and no others were performed after it. The disappointing demise of Artaud's project has been the subject of academic discussion. The most popular view is that Artaud may have been unable to communicate his particular vision of theatre to his actors.[174] I would like to suggest, instead, that the reason why *The Cenci* may have fallen short of its expectations is that the play does not encapsulate Artaud's theories of theatre as well as some of his unperformed pieces. As Percy Bysshe Shelley had already explained in the preface to his own *The Cenci* (1819), the quality of the Italian family's history, with its depraved and sordid father, possible rape and various murders and executions, made it a perfect subject for tragedy. 'Cloth[ing] it to the apprehensions of [his] countrymen in such language and actions as would bring it home to their hearts', Shelley hoped that by playing down the horrors and emphasising the pleasure derived from the poetic nature of the sufferings the play could be aligned to great tragedies like Sophocles's *Oedipus the King* or Shakespeare's *King Lear*.[175] I am not proposing that Shelley succeeded where Artaud did not, or that the latter could not see the tragic possibilities the Cenci scenario offered, but rather that the capacity to create empathy in the viewer, a basic requisite of the tragic form, seemed to be an obvious quality of the original story.

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[174] See Albert Bermel, *Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty* (London: Methuen, 2001), p. 80.
[175] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Cenci*, in *Shelley's Prose and Poetry*, ed. by Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, 2nd edn (London and New York ,NY: W.W. Norton and Company, 2002), p. 142.

Shelley amplified it by toning down the violence and giving the characters, particularly Beatrice, long speeches through which to explore the origin and depth of their feelings. Artaud's treatment of the story of the Cenci family is markedly different from Shelley's, but not altogether effective.

Artaud's theory of language, mainly his neglect of spoken word and prioritisation of noises or cries, was revolutionary and would have a tremendous impact on later pieces of the theatre of the absurd like Eugène Ionesco's *La Cantatrice chauve* (1950) or *Les Chaises* (1952), where characters are seen articulating unintelligible sounds that eventually become phrases or sentences. Scenarios like *Paul les Oiseaux, ou la Place de l'amour* (1924-5) or *La Pierre philosophale* (1931) are perfect examples of Artaud's ideas on language put into practice, with extensive stage directions that blur the boundaries between prose and drama and only one or two lines uttered in each piece. *The Cenci*, on the other hand, does not take such linguistic liberties. If Cenci does make a point of explaining that '[t]he difference between crimes committed in life and those on stage, is that in life we do more and say less, while on stage we talk and talk and do very little', the actual speeches in the play are rather normative, and the use of sudden noises, colours, objects or tonality is not particularly remarkable in the first three acts.[176] Apart from an early orgy glimpsed through a lifted veil and accompanied by an *'amplified sound [...] reflected in sharp ridges'*, and an interesting passage that describes the crowd of actors as a unique body *'drawing in its breath as if it had received a violent punch in the stomach'*, there is little to indicate special emphasis on corporeality.[177] The setting in Act II does attempt to generate affect, but it does so through location, situating the scene in *'[a]n indeterminate place. A moor, or perhaps a hall or a stairway or gallery, what you*

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[176]Antonin Artaud, *The Cenci*, in *Collected Works: Volume 4*, I.i, p. 124.
[177] Ibid., I.iii, pp. 126, 129.

will. Darkness everywhere'.[178] Harking back to the Gothic tradition of Lewis and Baillie, in its capacity to create affect through the *mise-en-scène*, Artaud's *The Cenci* makes reference to the occasional obligatory storm or thunderclap, but does not offer a seemingly different play from Shelley's. It is only the crucial last scene that shows the extent to which the authors differ in their use of mutilation.

Shelley's play does not give setting a major role, limiting the *mise-en-scène* to '*[a] Hall of the Prison*', and the stage directions do not mention particular sounds or the tone of voices.[179] Artaud's version, on the contrary, turns the cell into a full-blown torture chamber that reminded one reviewer of Piranesi's sketches.[180] It includes '*[a] wheel, suspended horizontally from above [...] on a shaft running through the hub*' from which Beatrice is seen '*hanging [...] by her hair*' and being '*pushed along by a guard*'.[181] It is worth noting that this scene was acted differently because the action was deemed too dangerous by Iya Abdy, who was instead strapped to the wheel horizontally. Such directorial decisions may have had an impact on audience affect, as the original vision of this scene is a lot more violent than its actual execution. The intended physicality is emphasised through the use of noises that make the prison comparable to '*a factory at full production*' and include stage directions such as '*the wheel turns*' or '*the prison screams*', the latter indicating that the setting is important enough to be anthropomorphised.[182] In Shelley this scene culminates with the announcement of the fate of Beatrice and his brother – '[t]hey must die' – but the actual sentence imposed on them is never revealed.[183] No punishment is made explicit, and only passing references to the 'engines' or the 'rack' remind us that the characters

[178] Ibid., II.ii, p. 135.
[179] Ibid., V.iv, p. 198.
[180] Ronald Hayman, *Artaud and After* (Oxford, London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 98.
[181] Ibid., IV.iii, pp. 150-1.
[182] Ibid., p. 150.
[183] Shelley, *The Cenci*, V.iii, p. 199.

have been tortured.[184] Artaud's version of the same scene exploits its potential for affect through the introduction of a *'procession to the block'* which *'sets off on a seven-beat Inca rhythm'* that *'becomes louder'* and eventually merges with a *'kind of desperate human voice'*.[185] But for all its more explicit affective appeal, *The Cenci* did not manage to have the desired spectatorial impact. In comparison to *The Cenci*, Artaud's other theatre of cruelty exhibits a much more focused display of the qualities that could bring such a project to fruition. Amongst the plays and scenarios that were never staged during Artaud's life, one stands out particularly for the conjunction of bodies and affect it offers. *The Spurt of Blood*, included in his collection *Umbilical Limbo* (*L'Ombilique des Limbes*, 1925), works as the perfect counterpart to *The Cenci*. Even though it was not officially scheduled as part of the intended programme for the theatre of cruelty, it gives an indication of the full extent of Artaud's dramatic project.[186]

The Spurt of Blood received some attention after the playwright's death, and was performed by Peter Brook in 1964 as part of the 'Theatre of Cruelty' season. As much as it can be said to have a plot, the play deals with a cataclysm that separates two lovers, the death of one of them, and the increasingly absurd corporeal exploitation of a nurse. It opens with the main characters, introduced as 'young man' and 'girl', professing their love and telling each other that 'everything is fine' in a variety of tones – *'in a quickened, throbbing voice'* first, then *'lower'* and finally *'on an exalted, high-pitched tone'*.[187] This idyllic, if already tense, beginning is soon interrupted, in the style of Artaud's methodology of shock, by several instances of

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[184] Ibid., V.ii and iii, p. 195-6.
[185] Artaud, *The Cenci*, IV.iii, pp. 152-3.
[186] I am using the English version of the text available in *Antonin Artaud: Collected Works*, vol.1, trans. by Victor Corti (London: Calder and Boyars, 1968), pp. 62-65.
[187] Artaud, *The Spurt of Blood*, in *Collected Works of Antonin Artaud: Volume I*, trans. by Victor Corti (London: Calder and Boyars, 1968), pp. 62-3.

almost unstageable violence. The 'well-made world' of their mutual love is visited, soon after a pause for silence, by a sudden *'noise like a huge wheel spinning, blowing out wind'* and a *'hurricane [that] comes between them'*.[188] The stage directions indicate that, at this moment, *'two stars collide'* and, most tellingly, *'a succession of limbs of flesh fall'*.[189] This limbic shower includes *'feet, hands, scalps, masks, colonnades, porticoes, temples and alembics'*, and is followed by the descent onto the stage of a series of animals symbolising the plagues that visit mankind in the Bible.[190] This visual onslaught is followed by the appearance of a group of actors, speaking in different tones whilst 'thunder rages' in the background.[191] Such investment in the capacity of sound to affect an audience is only matched by the fixation on the ravaged female body of the wetnurse and the play's melodramatic acting, which often veers from one extreme of the emotional gamut to the other.[192] The corporeality is emphasised by the grotesque eroticism evident in the wetnurse's histrionically inflated bosom, which she must hold up with her hands.[193] Her reduction to a body is manifest in the knight's request that she come closer – 'bring your breasts over here' – and, more tellingly, in the play's final stage direction: *'[a] host of scorpions crawl out from under the WETNURSE's dress and start swarming in her vagina which swells and splits, becomes transparent and shimmers like the sun'*.[194] Aside from the sheer complexity of staging this moment of corporeal transgression convincingly, the shocking value of such a scene is increased by the concession to genital nudity. The scorpions do not merely crawl down the nurse's legs, but emerge from her vagina.

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[188] Ibid., p. 63.
[189] Ibid.
[190] Ibid.; Bermel, *Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty*, p. 54.
[191] Ibid., p. 64.
[192] There is no room here for a full discussion of the symbolic ravaging of the female body in 'The Spurt of Blood', but its apparent misogynistic discourse could be challenged on the grounds that the play seems to offer an allegory of the creation of the world. This means the play is not necessarily advocating sexist views of the female body, but perhaps questioning their origin.
[193] Ibid., p. 63.
[194] Ibid., pp. 64, 65.

Shocking as this denouement must necessarily seem, for there is no previous action that could possibly prepare the viewer for such a graphic turn of events, it seems a logical one to the play. Just before the climactic bodying forth of the nurse, a character simply referred to as 'the whore' causes the spurt of the blood of the play's title. God's refusal to let go of her drives her to bite on the 'huge hand' that had seized her and set her hair on fire. This event causes an extreme affective moment comparable to the performances of body artist Ron Athey in the 1990s. If Athey's projection of bodily fluids to the audience had the added impact that the artist was HIV-positive, the 'great spurt of blood' that 'slashes across the stage' in Artaud's play would constitute a similar confrontational attack on the audience.[195] This idea would seem to be seconded by the fact that the bleeding is seen partially through bursts of lightning, after which most of the actors resurface as corpses.

Artaud's dramatic project was one that, like the grand guignol, expected 'violent reactions from the audience'.[196] Through a direct attack on theatre, particularly the position and role of the spectator, the theatre of cruelty also aimed to critique the staples of social order and its hierarchical structures, from family to justice.[197] Space and time become a form of affective reality that draws attention to itself and to the dynamics of the dramatic performance, that is, its meaning beyond words. Such an artistic endeavour, although systematically different from Greek or Jacobean tragedy in its refusal of pity as a form of catharsis or the two-dimensional performative experience, can be counted amongst the other corporeal dramatic instances considered in this chapter. If they are all inherently different, their art

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[195] Ibid., p. 65. It is worth mentioning that Athey did not use his own blood, but that of a clean donor. See Suzanne Fields, 'Jane Alexander's Toughest Role', *The Dispatch*, 4 July 1994, <http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1734&dat=19940704&id=_eUcAAAAIBAJ&sjid=1FIEAA AAIBAJ&pg=2693,272332> [accessed February 2012].
[196] Artaud, quoted in Hayman, *Artaud and After*, p. 97.
[197] Ibid.

predicated under specific socio-historical contexts and through distinguished staging machineries, they share an affective core. Together, they form a precursive discourse of the type of direct and carnal entertainment that culminated in the cinematic bodily nightmares of the twenty-first century. Film, in its advantageous position as a medium that does not rely on the unpredictability of present time, reconfigures affect through the use of pre and post-production techniques. Images can be selected for maximum impact, and they can be altered to create atmospheres conducive to the concrete and syncretic feelings films seek to arouse in the spectator. It is crucial that we envisage cinematic affect as intrinsically connected to its dramatic counterpart, for its directorial decisions are not dissimilar to those once made by de Lorde or Artaud. The next chapter considers the screening of mutilation in order to explore the development and implications of affective corporeal transgression in postmillennial horror cinema.

CHAPTER 3. Cinematic Affect: The Screening of Corporeal Transgression

Section 1. Early Horror and the Cinema of Attractions

'Cinema is a medium of shock and excitement and stimulation'.[1]

'There is no difference between the cinema and the theatre', wrote Artaud in an article about the affective possibilities of the former.[2] His conceptualisation of drama as a social valve of release is equally applicable to cinema. In fact, according to Artaud people seek cinema precisely because it affords a more instant 'violent gratification' than conventional drama.[3] Feeling quite strongly that drama had to find a way of competing with this type of affective medium, Artaud tried to develop a form of corporeal acting that would provide a similar cathartic experience. But in his search for spectatorial impact, Artaud eventually succumbed to the power of the image. It is not coincidental that some of his projected scenarios were either horror-influenced (*The 32*, undated), adaptations of Gothic classics (*The Monk/Le Moine*, 1931) or pieces that featured ominous slaughterhouse scenes (*The Butcher's Revolt/La Révolte du boucher*, 1930). The idea of cinema as a problematic and affective medium, one that would launch a metaphoric attack on the retina of the spectator, is, of course, also recognisable in the work of the surrealists, who very actively appealed to the viewer's somatic body. Like the eye slitting in the opening sequence of *An Andalusian Dog/Un Chien Andalou* (Luis Buñuel, 1929), a film that Artaud claimed had borrowed elements from his own *The Seashell and the Clergyman/La Coquille et le clergyman*

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[1] David J. Slocum, quoted in Holly Millea, 'Voyeurs, Guns, and Money', *Premiere* 12 (1999), 62-9, 100 (p. 65).
[2] Antonin Artaud, 'Witchcraft and the Cinema', in *Collected Works: Volume III*, trans. by Alastair Hamilton (London: John Calder, 1999), p. 66.
[3] Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, p. 60.

(Germaine Dulac, 1928), Artaud's filmic ideas sought to confront representation by 'tear[ing] the image away from [it]' and 'transplant[ing] it directly into the film spectator's ocular nerves and sensations'.[4] This type of cinema would consist of 'purely visual sensations in which the force would emerge from a collision exacted on the eyes'.[5] Artaud's influential ideas for a cinema of cruelty that arouses horror in viewers, makes an ocular claim more largely applicable to the medium itself.[6] In fact, since the 1970s, cinema has been understood as affective in its inception, as I will move on to show. Optic effects (kinetoscopes, etc.) and special effects in drama, particularly those used in Gothic plays, had a major impact in its development. In a sense, film can be said to have been born out of the same affective titillations that turned such spectacles as *The Castle Spectre* into major successes.

The link between the stage and horror film is even more direct than my account of their similarities has so far allowed. It is now customary to see the Gothic novel and Edgar Allan Poe's short stories as immediate precursors of the genre.[7] Whilst I would not want to deny the obvious influence of Gothic prose on its formation, it is important to consider, as Peter Hutchings has done, how the birth of horror film is also a direct consequence of the commercial value of specific dramatic adaptations.[8] The huge popularity of the British (Hamilton Deane, 1924) and American (John L. Balderston, 1927) productions of *Dracula* were largely responsible for Tod Browning's equally successful film adaptation of 1931. Broadway

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[4] Stephen Barber, *Artaud: The Screaming Body* (London: Creation books, 1999), pp. 26-7.
[5] Artaud, quoted in Barber, *Artaud*, p. 27.
[6] Amongst others, Artaud's writings influenced the work of the French Lettrists Isidore Isou and Maurice Lemaître, the recorded body-art performances of the Vienna Action Group, and even important cinema auteurs like Ingmar Bergman, Akira Kurosawa, Robert Bresson and Alfred Hitchcock. See Barber, *Artaud*, pp. 114-7; Bermel, *Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty*, p. 112.
[7] Amongst the most influential studies to lay down this view are James B. Twitchell, *Dreadful Pleasures: An Anatomy of Modern Horror* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press,1985), 39-52, and Mark Jancovich, *Horror* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1992), 19-33.
[8] Peter Hutchings, *The Horror Film* (Harlow: Pearson, 2004), p. 11.

productions like Avery Hopwood and Mary Roberts Rinehart's *The Bat* (1920) and

John Willard's *The Cat and the Canary* (1922) were also adapted to great success,

laying the foundations for such influential horror films as *The Bat Whispers* (Roland

West, 1930), later remade into the Vincent Price-led *The Bat* (Crane Wilbur, 1959),

and *The Cat and the Canary* (Paul Leni, 1927).[9] In a sense, it was the financial drive

that saw profit in the stage productions of these, often Gothic plays, which facilitated

the birth of the self-professed horror film.[10] However, if horror films from the 1920s

and 1930s can be seen as the official institutionalisation of the genre, particularly after

the British censors created the H certificate exclusively for them, German

expressionism and the early films of Georges Méliès and other pioneers of silent

cinema have been retrospectively perceived to be the forefathers of the genre.[11] This

remains a controversial subject for some and one which is worth exploring because it

relates to the very problematic boundaries between genre and affect that I am dealing

with in this study.

Carlos Clarens was one of the first scholars to locate the inception of the

horror film in silent cinema. In his *An Illustrated History of the Horror Film* (1967) he

claims that, although Georges Méliès very explicitly sought not to shock audiences

and stayed away from the excesses of the grand guignol, '[g]houlies, ghosties, [and]

all things that go bump on the screen, are forever in his debt'.[12] Méliès' impact on

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[9] Ibid., p. 13. The latter has been the subject of at least three other adaptations.

[10] In fact, *Frankenstein* (James Whale, 1931) was the first horror film to be sold as and referred to as such. See Roy Kinnard, *Horror in Silent Films: A Filmography, 1896-1929* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1995), p. 1.

[11] Ibid., p. 9. Some have even called German expressionism the 'first great horror school'. See Ivan Butler, *Horror in the Cinema*, 2nd edn (London: A. Zwemmer; New York: A.S. Barnes & Co., 1970), p. 20.

[12] Carlos Clarens, *An Illustrated History of Horror and Science-Fiction Films* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1997), pp. 6, 8. It should be pointed out that Clarens often refers to these films as 'fantastic' and not as 'horror'. This is significant given the editorial decision to retitle his book *An Illustrated History of Horror* and Science Fiction *Films*, which would seem to suggest the need to refine this category so as not to imply that all horror is fantastic. Since his argument has largely influenced horror academia,

horror film is undeniable and even the suggestion that the French director was not interested in shocking audiences should be refined. Films like *The Haunted Castle/Le Manoir du Diable* are now credited with inaugurating the vampire film one year before the publication of Stoker's *Dracula*, and numerous other films speak directly to the Gothic tradition.[13] In fact, *A Terrible Night/Une nuit terrible* (1896), *The Bewitched Inn/L'Auberge Ensorcelée* (1897), *The Inn Where No Man Rests/L'Auberge du bon repos* (1903), *The Apparition/Le Revenant* (1903) and *The Mysterious Retort/L'Alchimiste Parafaragaramus ou la Cornue Infernale* (1906) all contain elements that would become staples of the genre.[14] His *The Conquest of the Pole/Conquête du pôle* (1912) also made an early concession to gore by featuring a realistic scene of a man being devoured by an Abominable Snowman. Critics like Mark Jancovich have found fault with Clarens' views, complaining of what they see as a retrospective reclaiming of films that would not have been consumed or understood as horror at the time of their release.[15] Such critics, however, accept that films like *The Student of Prague/Der Student von Prag* (Stellan Rye and Paul Wegener, 1913), *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari/Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (Robert Weine, 1919), *The Golem/Der Golem* (Paul Wegener and Henrik Galeen, 1920), and *Nosferatu/Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens* (F.W. Murnau, 1922) may have been perceived as or associated with 'the cinema of attractions', or early cinema that privileged effect over narrative.[16] It is as part of this specific tradition of affective cinema, with its nods to what would become the shock cut or startle effect, that I wish to consider the advent of cinematic horror.

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and given the spatial constraints of this study, I will not take issue with the potential problems of conglomerating the 'fantastic' and 'horror'.

[13] Abbot, *Celluloid Vampires*, p. 1.

[14] Rick Worland, *The Horror Film: An Introduction* (Oxford and Malden: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 33-4.

[15] Mark Jancovich, 'General Introduction', in *Horror: The Film Reader*, ed. by Mark Jancovich (London and New York: 2002), pp. 1-23, p. 7.

[16] Ibid.

According to influential cinema scholar Tom Gunning, early cinema was not driven by a narrative impulse, this being a later development of film as a medium.[17] Rather, early cinema was dominated by a will to recreate stage effects or illusions that would fascinate viewers, an idea sustained by these films' usual breaking of the fourth wall and their compulsion to merely show interesting or unusual situations to an acknowledged viewer.[18] It is the 'exhibitionist confrontation rather than diegetic absorption' in these films and their pointing 'toward a direct assault on the spectator' that connects them to the 'stimulus' of fairground attractions and 'carnival rides' from which early cinema receives its sobriquet.[19] This is evident in proto-horror productions like *The Corsican Brothers* (George Albert Smith, 1898) and *The Cave of the Demons/La Caverne maudite* (Georges Méliès, 1898), which used double exposure to conjure up spiritual visitations, or early execution docudramas like *Execution of Mary, Queen of Scots* (Alfred Clark, 1895), *Execution of a Spy* (unknown, 1900) or *The Execution of Czolgosz with Panorama of Auburn Prison* (Thomas A. Edison, 1901), which made use of the stop-track motion to present videos of 'real' deaths.[20] Tom Gunning goes even further in his treatment of directors Albert E. Smith and J. Stuart Blackton, redefining the idea of the cinema of attractions as an 'aesthetic of astonishment' that 'clearly aligns the terror of the spectators with a conscious delectation of shocks and thrills'.[21] So important is the idea of the optical illusion to this conceptualisation of early cinema that influential directors like Méliès

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[17] Tom Gunning, 'The Cinema of Attraction[s]: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde', *Wide Angle*, 8 (1986), 63-70 (p. 64).
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid., pp. 66, 70. It is worth noting that the term was originally applied to theatre by Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein and that the idea of the 'cinema of attractions' was actually developed by Gunning in conjunction with André Graudeault in 1985.
[20] Alan Jones, *The Rough Guide to Horror Movies* (London and New York: Rough Guides, 2005), p. 15; Ron Miller, *Special Effects: An Introduction to Movie Magic* (Minneapolis: Twenty-First Century Books, 2006), p. 13.
[21] Tom Gunning, 'An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator', in *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing*, ed. by Linda Williams (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989), pp. 114-33 (pp. 119-20).

or the Spanish Segundo de Chomón have often been popularly dubbed 'magicians'. The relevance of making something unbelievable believable, even if for a fraction of a second, is in keeping with my theory of the encounter of the BwO in horror. According to Gunning, the screaming fits generated by early train films like the famous *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat/L'arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* (Lumière Brothers, 1895) can be explained as an acknowledgement of 'the power of the apparatus to sweep away a prior and firmly entrenched sense of reality'.[22] Such a construction of early cinema strongly resonates with my affective corporeal model of horror: it shows the workings of affect, which, by operating on the somatic body, may bring a different sense of corporeality from that experienced through the socium. This relies on horror's capacity to create an illusion of corporeal transgression that can shock the spectatorial body. In a revision of Tom Gunning's ideas in 2006, Wanda Strauven proposes that early cinema is characterized by a form of 'bodily violence' recognisable in the grand guignol tradition, and that the 'numerous car accidents and cutting up of the body [that] were exhibited to the early film spectator [...] attempted to shock [...] rather than appeal to their taste'.[23] My contention is that horror is the genre where such an enterprise is most explicitly carried out.

This is not to suggest that horror, like early cinema, makes corporeal transgression pass for the real thing – or at least not until it deliberately attempts to achieve such a purpose, as in the case of faux snuff. I have written about the role that ritual plays in cinema-going in chapter one, but it is crucial to note that horror, like early cinema, relies on a very 'controlled threat of danger'.[24] As Gunning explains:

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[22] Ibid., p. 122.
[23] Wanda Strauven, 'Introduction to an Attractive Concept', in *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, ed. by Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), pp. 11-27 (p. 18).
[24] Gunning, 'An Aesthetic of Astonishment', p. 124.

The panic before the image on the screen exceeds a simple psychic reflex, similar to those one experiences in a daily encounter with urban traffic or industrial production. [...] Pleasure derives from the energy released by the play between the shock caused by this illusion of danger and delight in its pure illusion. The jolt experienced becomes a shock of recognition.[25]

Horror, because self-aware as a contained, commodified experience set within certain safety parameters, becomes policed or domesticated in the same way that a fairground attraction does. It is not a coincidence, after all, that successful horror films like the *Saw* franchise, have given way to eponymous rides in popular theme parks like Thorpe Park. The affective quality of both experiences (filmic and physical) also accounts for the correspondence between contemporary horror films and the manufacturing of spin-off video games. *Saw*, for example, has already spawned *Saw: The Video Game* (Konami, 2009) and *Saw II: Flesh and Blood* (2010) for the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 consoles. These are premised on the same aesthetic of astonishment as the films but take the concept of attraction further into haptic grounds that had remained unexplored until the digital and virtual revolutions.[26]

Situating the advent of horror at the dawn of filmic affect is also consistent with accounts of the genre that see the horrific elements inherent in these early productions as evincing their capacity to 'show[...] the boundaries of the self or the stability of the real world to be fragile and insecure'.[27] If we take early horror as a staple of this exploration of physical boundaries, that is, of a possible desire to play

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[25] Ibid., p. 129.

[26] The view that the 'cinema of attractions' as an aesthetic concern may be applied to the virtual world of video games is becoming widely acceptable. See, for example, Alison McMahan, '*Chez le Photographe c'est chez moi*: Relationship of Actor and Filmed Subject to Camera in Early Film and Virtual Reality Spaces', in *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, pp. 291-308.

[27] Casper Tyberg, 'Shadow-Souls and Strange Adventures: Horror and the Supernatural in European Silent Film', in *The Horror Film*, ed. by Stephen Prince (London and New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), pp. 15-39 (p. 17).

with the distance between the spectatorial and fictional bodies, it is easy to see how torture porn and faux snuff are part of a long affective continuum that share similar artistic preoccupations. In fact, considering how much the supernatural horrors of films like *Nosferatu* owe to advances in camera techniques and special effects, the twenty-first-century horrors discussed in this study can be perceived as a logical consequence of the status of their respective cinematic technologies.[28] The history of horror becomes coterminous with advancements in the recording of images and their affective potential. The implications of this claim for contemporary horror are thoroughly investigated in later sections, but it is worth noting at this point that this historicist-materialist approach is already discernible in the critiques of horror scholars like S. S. Prawer who, in the early 1980s, were already warning readers against the dangers of a certain 'type of horror-movie [...] which uses the conventions of its genre to titillate the sadistic and voyeuristic tendencies of its audience through technicoloured exhibitions of bloody violence and stimulating nudities'.[29] Such films were better avoided because 'sick minds and hypersensitive nervous systems may find their sickness aggravated and their anxiety-dreams invaded by powerfully disturbing images'.[30] These diatribes show a short-sighted approach to the genre that does not perceive it as always already trying to offer a form of extreme experience, as a genre aware of its bodily workings. In fact, the corporeal threat that horror poses is a preoccupation recognisable in early reflexive films that try to tackle the possible detrimental effects of recording and visual technological advances.

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[28] Curtis Harrington, 'Ghoulies and Ghosties', in *Horror Film Reader*, ed. by Alain Silver and James Ursini (New York: Limelight Editions, 2000), pp. 9-19 (pp. 9-10).
[29] S. S. Prawer, *Caligari's Children: The Film as Tale of Terror* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 49.
[30] Ibid.

These specific nightmares have proved so affective that they have often garnered their directors social opprobrium. This is partly because horror films self-consciously explore the controversies that surround the misuse of visual technology, the very same area that critics like Prawer have found problematic. Unfortunately, this has led reviewers to conceive of the horror film as articulating and advocating a form of visual sadism itself even when constructed as a form of critique. I would like to consider that, precisely because there is an inherent desire in horror to affect the viewer corporeally, the spectatorial dynamics that develop from an encounter with these type of films necessarily rely on a species of masochism. In their investment in a reflexive form of affect, it is precisely allegedly sadistic films that may help in the unravelling of the viewing structures behind the act of consuming affect and its link to technology.

Section 2. *Peeping Tom* and the Challenge to Sadistic Cinema

'I made them see their terror as the spike went in.

And if death has a face, they saw that too'.[31]

Negative reviews have often followed the release of affective films that draw attention to their viewers. Films like *The Eyes of Laura Mars* (Irvin Keshner, 1978), which explores the use of violence in the fashion industry, have received irate criticism precisely because they force their audiences to reflect on the process of watching. In such cases, viewers are perceived as implicated in the process of condoning and perpetuating violence, generally against women, through the act of looking.[32] However, *Peeping Tom* and its treatment of the recording of corporeal transgression, whilst steeped in the affective exploitation of horror, also sets itself apart from previous examples of filmic corporeal transgression. Its subject matter, the deadly project of one Mark Lewis (Karlheinz Böhm) to record a number of killings through the use of a double-lens spiked camera that lets victims witness their own death, proved too extreme for its time and brought the career of its director to an end.[33] Upon release the film was reviled for its sadism and for what was seen as an uneasy spectatorial complicity established through the use of the camera. Contemporary film critic Isabel Quigly, who had already written a scathing review of another masterpiece of corporeal transgression, *Eyes without a Face/Les Yeux sans visage* (Georges Franju, 1960), complained that the film managed to involve one through a 'direct

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[31] Mark Lewis in *Peeping Tom*.

[32] See Lucy Fisher and Marcia Landy, '*The Eyes of Laura Mars*: A Binocular Critique', in *American Horrors: Essays on the Modern American Horror Film*, ed. by Gregory A. Walker (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), pp. 62-78.

[33] Wheeler Winton Dixon, *A History of Horror* (London and New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010), p. 74.

emotional realism' that made the experience most unpleasant.[34] The film's 'insinuating, under-the-skin horrors' were also particularly reproachable because they apparently aimed to appeal to 'normal homely filmgoers'.[35] This mixture of reflexivity, direct address and violence is of particular interest to this study. My contention is that the challenge that the reflexive horror of *Peeping Tom* posed to the filmic world back in 1960 is comparable to that of extreme examples of contemporary corporeal transgression like torture porn, faux snuff or the film about snuff. As I will move on to argue, if special effects and realism are crucial to the creation of cinematic affect, films that showcase mutilation tend to offer a form of reflexive critique that only accentuates their capacity for spectatorial impact.

Peeping Tom proves a perfect example of affective horror not only because its complicated reception history betrays the film's capacity to disturb and have a lasting effect on viewers. It also was initially perceived, like much torture porn, as a gratuitous experiment in visual sadism, the word 'sadistic' appearing in most of the press initially generated upon its release.[36] The *Monthly Film Bulletin* took the connection one step further by more specifically exposing the possible connections between Powell's film and the work of the Marquis de Sade:

> Any doubts that this is an authentically *Sadiste* [*sic*] films [*sic*] can be dispelled by a reference to the *120 Journees de Sodome*, especially part IV, and the Murderous Passions number 41 and 46. It is only surprising that while the Marquis' books are still forbidden here after practically two centuries, it is

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[34] Isabel Quigly, quoted in Adam Lowenstein, *Shocking Representation: Historical Trauma, National Cinema, and the Modern Horror Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 55.
[35] Ibid., p. 56.
[36] The best examples are Campbell Dixon's review for *The Daily Telegraph* (9 April 1960) and Derek Hill's for *Tribune* (29 April 1960). See Ian Christie, 'The Scandal of *Peeping Tom*', in *Powell, Pressburger, and Others*, ed. by Ian Christie (London: British Film Institute, 1978), pp. 53-59.

possible, within the commercial industry, to produce films like *Peeping Tom*.

De Sade at least veiled his enjoyment under the pretence of being a moralist.[37]

This claim is obviously only partially and, I would even add, casually true. The

Murderous Passion 41 in *120 Days of Sodom* (1785) involves 'impal[ing] girls' throats

with a silver hatpin', which is far from a spiked camera leg.[38] Murderous Passion 46

actually involves 'sprinkl[ing] a deadly powder onto flowers' that makes female

victims die 'with [their] entrails hanging out of [their] ass[es]', an image that is never

insinuated or referred to in *Peeping Tom*.[39] Powell's film is also far from immoral,

never indulging in gory images and killing off its murderer. But such obvious critical

shortcomings have not stopped the film from receiving a similar treatment in later

decades. William Johnson, in a 1980 article for *Film Quarterly* that tried precisely to

recuperate the historical importance of the film, still praised its director's 'choice and

handling' of what he saw as a 'Sadian theme'.[40] This is the case with some critics

even today, after *Peeping Tom*'s total critical recovery as a crucial part of horror

history. David Pirie's updated study of British Gothic horror, for example, insists on

calling Powell's film a 'masterpiece' of what he terms a British 'Sadian trilogy' that

would include the two other contemporary horror films produced by Anglo-

Amalgamated, *Horrors of the Black Museum* (Arthur Crabtree, 1959) and *Circus of*

Horrors (Sidney Hayers, 1960).[41] Such propositions still seem to be based on the

grounds that the film borrows aesthetically from 1950s pornography and is

preoccupied with the audiences' appetite for violence and gore.[42] Whilst both of these

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[37] David Robinson, 'Review of *Peeping Tom*', *Monthly Film Bulletin* (May 1960), quoted in Ian Christie, 'The Scandal of *Peeping Tom*', p. 56.
[38] The Marquis de Sade, *120 Days of Sodom*, trans. by James Havoc (Washington: Solar Books, 2008), p. 268.
[39] Ibid.
[40] William Johnson, '*Peeping Tom*: A Second Look', *Film Quarterly* 33 (1980), 2-10 (p. 2).
[41] Pirie, *A New Heritage of Horror*, p. 117.
[42] Ibid., p. 114.

claims are true, they do not seem sufficient to grant *Peeping Tom* the sadistic label. As a brief close-reading of the most contentious scenes will reveal, quite the opposite is true: the film does not advocate sadism but in fact proposes a total reversal of the sadistic gaze and, in this respect, reveals how horror cinema more widely situates its viewer in a masochistic position. It also evinces the workings of affect in reflexive horror films in a manner that supports my later claims regarding complex spectatorial alignments in *Hostel*.

Peeping Tom's pre-credits sequence, which shows an arrow hitting the bull's eye of an archer's target and is immediately substituted by a human eye, sets the tone for the type of filmic aggression viewers are about to encounter. In its status as a potential 'razorblade gesture' in the vein of *An Andalusian Dog*, it foregrounds a desire to offer an 'emotional, psychic and ethical slicing open of the gaze of the spectator'.[43] The attack on the eye, or its substitute, is followed by a long take that follows a prostitute into her apartment. The screen is immediately aligned with the gaze of the killer through the use of a subjective point of view (henceforth POV) shot that limits the content of the images to what the killer 'sees'. The already potentially contentious luring of the viewer into the morally dubious territory of prostitution is taken one affective step further when the look on the prostitute's face changes from casual disinterest to genuine fear. Her death is insinuated by her extreme facial contortions, recoiling and agonistic pleas. This scene is replicated later, in extreme precision, through the murder of Vivian, a stand-in actress. Although this scene is not shot through a subjective POV, it is longer and better orchestrated, with Mark painstakingly setting up the scene for murder as Vivian, unaware of her imminent death, dances happily around the room. As the true moment of death nears, the camera

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[43] Asbjørn Grønstad, *Screening the Unwatchable: Spaces of Negation in Post-Millennial Art Cinema* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 6.

follows Mark from a distance. This allows for maximum affect, as the viewer can notice that Mark's camera has changed (Vivian's face reveals this through facial gestures and its reflection of a flash of light) but cannot distinguish the specifics of the transformation. As Vivian pulls backwards, the camera scopes the vision, tunnelling towards the closing space between the two characters in one last lethal sweep. If these scenes were not enough to create a certain feeling of complicity in the potential spectator, the film ends in an incriminating note: the credits are replaced by what looks like the end of a camera reel. The film then concludes without providing a cast of characters or captions which may identify the members of the crew. The message seems obvious: are we too, as consumers of affect, engaging in a voyeuristic relationship not unlike that established between Mark and his films of death?

Peeping Tom compromises viewers by involving them in the acts of murder, and this occurs almost two decades before the slasher subgenre would go on to fully exploit the affective and implicatory powers of the subjective POV shot in films like *Black Christmas* (Bob Clark, 1974) or *Halloween*. To a certain extent, this early murder scene is not unusual and is, in fact, comparable to that of another seminal violent horror film of the 1960s. *Psycho*'s (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960) renowned shower sequence famously contains fifty-two shots that combine subjective POVs and disembodied shots of the shower floor colouring up with what the viewer assumes is blood. However, unlike *Psycho*, *Peeping Tom* never shows the true moment of death. The murder sequences stop just before the penetration of the spike into the victim's body. This is caused by either the reel running out or the lights 'fad[ing] too soon', as Mark tragically laments. In addition to this, Mark's own head often blocks the captured images, further removing spectators from the frame by reminding them that they too are watching images. In the case of the prostitute's murder, such obstructions

to full immersion are further complicated by the extrication of the camera from the moment of murder and into a later reflective moment. As the image pulls away from the screaming women (and after a cut to the projector itself has situated the images in the past) it is slowly revealed that Mark is also a spectator, savouring the pleasures and frustrations of the replay. The camera thus triply deflects the spectacle of corporeal transgression: firstly, by refusing to show it; secondly, by sometimes positioning Mark not as a mediator, but as literal barrier between camera and violence; and, thirdly, by drawing attention to its own constructed nature. It would appear that, as Parveen Adams has put it, *Peeping Tom* can only be said to be invested in sadism insofar as spectators may be 'put in a position of wanting to see what it is that Mark Lewis wants to see', and not because the film shows signs of actual sadistic intent itself.[44]

In fact, even if we accept that Mark may be re-enacting a form of sadistic violence inflected by his traumatic coming of age at the hands of a castrating and tyrannical father figure, as the film seems to suggest through the various childhood voice-overs, the potential reification of the sadistic paternal gaze is still heavily undermined by the film's actions. As has been convincingly argued, Mark tends to situate himself more in the position of the victim than the attacker through his corporeal responses to other characters.[45] The melancholic longing with which he wishes to be part of the fear experience after having been the subject of similar experiments as a child also suggests that Mark masochistically projects himself into the bodies of his victims. Most importantly, Mark dies recording himself die, defeated by his incapacity to kill his girlfriend Helen (Anna Massey). As Elisabeth Bronfen has

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[44] Parveen Adams, *The Emptiness of the Image: Psychoanalysis and Sexual Differences* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 95.

[45] Elena del Río, 'The Body of Voyeurism: Mapping a Discourse of the Senses in Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom*', *Camera Obscura* 15 (2000), 114-49 (pp. 120-1).

very perceptively noted, this is of particular relevance because it shows how '[i]n the same gesture that Mark seeks to confirm his masculine sadism by sacrificing a feminine, masochistic body, he invariably falls into the passive position himself'.[46] Not only does he see himself in the death of his victims, but his incapacity to attain that moment of true identification leads him to a masochistic suicide in which pain does not become half as important as the catching of the last glimpse of unmediated fear.

Accusations of sadism are, however, not merely easy to disavow through close reading, but also via a brief consideration of Deleuze's ideas on sadism, which have been influential in reshaping contemporary understandings of masochistic and sadistic practices in cinematic representation. It is legitimate to observe that films like *Peeping Tom*, in their bleak and nihilistic outlook on human existence and their insistence on the attraction of the death drive, might echo Sade's project of utter 'negation' and 'destruction'.[47] However, this view overlooks the logic of the masochistic contract. In the case of cinema, this is achieved through the conscious decision of watching a horror film. Films like *Peeping Tom* cannot be sadistic because they make a pact with the viewer that validates and legitimises the presence of violence. The torturer in the masochistic contract cannot be compared to the figure of the sadist other than through their analogical similarity – they both inflict pain – because the pleasure gained by the masochist is very different from the pain suffered by the victim at the hands of a sadist.[48] The masochist in the masochistic contract wishes the torturer to fulfil a form of violent fantasy, whilst the victim of the sadist does not wish pain to be inflicted on

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[46] Elisabeth Bronfen, 'Killing Gazes, Killing in the Gaze: On Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom*', in *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects*, ed. by Renata Salecl and Slavoj Žižek (London and Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), pp. 59-88 (p. 81).
[47] Gilles Deleuze, 'Coldness and Cruelty', in *Masochism* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), pp. 9-38 (pp. 26-27).
[48] Ibid., p. 46.

them. In the case of horror, this is the equivalent of viewers desiring the violent film to affect them through corporeal transgression. The true sadist cannot take pleasure in a form of pain that is consensual, for this practice is specifically premised on a lack of agreement on the part of the victim.[49] This is to say that, whilst we could perceive the actions carried out by Mark Lewis in *Peeping Tom* as sadistic in and of themselves, the same cannot be said for the film itself.[50] Once the viewer decides to view the film, they enter the masochistic contract I have referred to.[51] The experience of watching torture porn, for example, is therefore more adequately conceptualised as a form of masochistic pleasure gained from the exposure to affect through a contractual encounter with corporeal transgression.[52]

This account is more in tune with recent re-evaluations of the reflexivity of films like *Peeping Tom* that have seen these products as breeding a form of 'self-consciousness in the audience' that is complicit with the killer's only insofar as it 'expos[es] and exploit[s] the (masochistic) complicity that lies at the heart of spectatorship'.[53] Such views take previous work on the capacity of these films to offer comments on the distance between viewers and viewed subjects and connect them to the broader issues regarding the masochistic contract established by horror film.[54]

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[49] Ibid., pp. 40-2.

[50] A contentious issue itself since these are mere representations and therefore could only be sadistic at a representational level.

[51] This is also applicable to the viewer who inadvertently finds such material. Films that play with corporeal transgression give a warning to their viewers, generally in the form of a pre-credits sequence that sets the tone for what is to come. The viewer can then decide either to leave the theatre or stop the DVD player. The case of films that do not follow this cautionary mode or exploit it for additional affect is analysed in the next four sections.

[52] A similar point has been made in connection to the filmic spectacle more widely, where cinema has been seen as 'not a sadistic institution but pre-eminently a contractual one based upon the premise of certain pleasures'. See Gaylyn Studlar, *In the Realm of Pleasure: Von Stenberg, Dietrich, and the Masochistic Aesthetic* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 177-98 (p. 182).

[53] Michele Aron, 'Looking On: Troubling Spectacles and the Complicitous Spectator', in *The Spectacle of the Real: From Hollywood to Reality TV and Beyond*, ed. by Geoff King (Bristol and Portland: Intellect, 2005), pp. 213-22 (pp. 216, 220-1).

[54] See, for example, Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988), pp. 32-41.

Most important, perhaps, is Carol J. Clover's repositioning of the viewing structures inherent in this process:

> *Peeping Tom* [...] should also be taken as a commentary [...], within the context of horror filmmaking, on the symbiotic interplay of the sadistic work of the filmmaker and the masochistic stake of the spectator, an arrangement on which horror cinema insists. There may be no such thing as purely masochistic spectatorship (or even, perhaps, purely sadistic moviemaking), but the job of horror – the job of movies people see *in order to be scared* – is to give the viewer as pure a dose as possible.[55]

In Clover's understanding of *Peeping Tom*, assaultive gazing is figured as male and sadistic, and reactive gazing is illustrated through the feminine and painful recoiling of Helen. This schema is more widely applicable to the cinematic apparatus of the horror film, with assaultive gazing being 'associated with those who hold the camera and reactive gazing with those who stare at the screen after the fact'.[56] The financial drive of horror is to locate the space of hurting and to mine it for its 'masochistic possibilities' through the repetition of certain recognisable formulas and scenarios.[57] It is this circularity that allows Clover to describe the moment of deliberately choosing to watch a horror film as a form of compulsion involving a desire to put oneself in a vulnerable and unpleasant state which is simultaneously gratifying. She elaborates by focusing on the possible correspondence between on-screen victim and horror viewer:

> I would suggest that [it] is a function of masochistic fantasy: that people who make movies sense the iterative 'my-turn-is-coming-soon' quality of victimization fantasies; that they consciously exploit the proved willingness of

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[55] Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*, p. 179.
[56] Ibid., p. 199.
[57] Ibid., pp. 199, 213.

the viewer (proved because he keeps paying for it) to imagine himself as a 'next victim'; and that the screen functions as a kind of anticipatory mirror intended not so much to instruct as to heighten the effect.[58]

This type of identificatory transubstantiation, one that revolts against the reluctance of entertaining 'the possibility of involvement with the victim's part', is crucial in understanding contemporary incarnations of corporeal transgression.[59] It relies on the premise that pain resides at the core of the horror experience and that a good film in this genre will be one that 'succeeds in "hurting" its [masochistic] viewers'.[60] My contention is that torture porn, faux snuff and films about snuff, in their use of graphic realism, reflexivity and complex alignments that shift from torturer to tortured, further investigate the affective limits of such a masochistic set-up.

As we can see, once such a system is considered, films like *Peeping Tom* emerge not as the dreaded treatises on the sadistic pleasures of filming murder vilified by its contemporary reviewers but as a radical 'critique of the *inherent* and *essential* sadism of the cinematic look'.[61] In the case of violent horror, where the connection between the act of looking and the spectacle of realistic gore is doubly emphasised, it is even more important that the films in question are re-evaluated for their affective capacity and not for their potential detrimental effects on viewers. As I will show, cautionary assumptions are unfounded and they ignore the fact that artistic affect pushes the boundaries of what is acceptable and representable on-screen. In the

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[58] Ibid., p. 221. There is no space in this project to discuss the gender specifics of such an argument – Clover also calls the form of masochism present in horror 'feminine masochism' to distinguish it from traditional psychoanalytic notions of masochism – but I would most definitely contest the feminist bias of this statement.

[59] Ibid., p. 228.

[60] Ibid., p. 229.

[61] Catherine Zimmer, 'The Camera's Eye: *Peeping Tom* and Technological Perversion', in *Horror Film: Creating and Marketing Fear*, ed. by Steffen Hantke (Jackson, MI: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), pp. 35-51 (p. 36). Italics in the original.

following sections I argue that the highly popular torture porn phenomenon, faux-snuff and the film about snuff contribute to the reflexivity of the genre by further problematising alignment between spectator and the complex dynamics of the scene of torture. The nature of the corporeal transgression in these films inevitably raises questions about spectatorial implication which, if by no means new to academic discussions of the horror genre, bring the role of affect in entertainment to new cinematic paths opened by advances in technology and special effects. I also consider the role that the moral implication of viewers plays in the creation of affect, as this is an element of contemporary horror that has been largely overlooked. A sustained analysis of the viewing structures in films like *Hostel, Saw* and *Snuff-Movie* is therefore crucial to understand how corporeal transgression can have a more direct filmic impact precisely through its embedding within the visual logistics of the medium. I have shown that cinema is almost inextricable from an affective drive. Corporeal transgression in recent cinema has turned this compulsion into its main selling point.

Section 3. Postmillennial Horror: Torture Porn and Visual Affect

'Test your limits'.[62]

Pornography and the Extreme Sequence

When *A Serbian Film/Srpski film* (Srdjan Spasojevic, 2010) made its first appearance

in Britain, its sheer extremity made *Guardian* reviewer Pete Cashmore prophesise

that, in its bid to 'out-disgust' all filmic antecedents, this European feature would be

the one to 'kill off torture porn for good'.[63] In the United Kingdom, it went on to join

a long list of censored horror classics like *Freaks* (Tod Browning, 1932), *The Last

House on the Left* (Wes Craven, 1972) or *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973) after

it became the most heavily censored film of the last two decades.[64] *A Serbian Film*,

which opens with a child watching his father on an adult tape, revolves around a

company interested in producing a new type of self-professed 'state of the art'

pornography that involves the sexual exploitation of newborns. It ends with an ex-

porn star inadvertently raping and killing his own son and wife and, after shooting

himself, becoming the fodder for future lucrative necrophilic enterprises. The events

that take place in-between the opening and closing scenes are no more than a series of

jumbled and rather interchangeable moments of corporeal transgression: necrophilia,

paedophilia, incest and murder. In his tirade against the future of torture porn after *A

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[62] Caption on the DVD case for the French DVD version of *Hostel*. The picture can be found on the *Imdb.com* page for the film: <http://www.imdb.com/media/rm3900741120/tt0450278> [accessed January 2012].

[63] Pete Cashmore, 'Will This New Movie Kill off Torture Porn for Good?', *The Guardian*, 28 August 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2010/aug/28/torture-porn-frightfest-quiz> [accessed February 2012].

[64] More than four minutes were edited out after the forty-nine cuts demanded by the British Board of Classification were effected. See Catherine Shoard, 'A Serbian Film Becomes the Most Censored Film in 16 Years', *The Guardian*, 26 November 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2010/nov/26/serbian-film-most-censored> [accessed February 2012].

Serbian Film, Cashmore explained part of the reason why the latter would sound 'a death knell' for the likes of the then upcoming *Saw 3D*: it would be impossible to top the 'sheer, unremitting foulness, cruelty and squalor' of Spasojevic's film.[65] However, the box office figures for *Saw 3D* showed a very different picture. The last instalment in the series outsold the supernatural horrors of *Paranormal Activity 2* (Tod Williams, 2010) and ended up grossing over $136 million wordwide, making it the most successful instalment after *Saw IV* and the fourth most financially profitable in the history of the franchise.[66] Cashmore's even stronger prediction that the disgusting nature of *A Serbian Film* would not be easily superseded has also been proven wrong by new entries in torture porn like *The Human Centipede II: Full Sequence* (Tom Six, 2012), which was initially refused a classification in the United Kingdom and has received a DVD and Blu-Ray release only as an 'unrated director's cut'.

Such cuts and active censorship of postmillennial horror films has often been predicated on the basis that certain extreme sequences 'eroticise or endorse sexual violence', fetishising attacks against other human beings – most condemnably, women and children.[67] If there is no space here to discuss the limitations of such narrow and essentialist understandings of the relation between audiences and products, reminiscent of the Columbine Massacre/Marilyn Manson debate, it is nevertheless surprising that a film like Spasojevic's would be conflated with the more expensive, stylised and mainstream Hollywood horrors of *Saw* and *Hostel*. *The Human Centipede II* offers an even more interesting case. Its first instalment, which circled around a mad scientist bent on surgically linking three individuals together in order to create a

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[65] Cashmore, 'Will This New Movie Kill off Torture Porn for Good?'
[66] Figures retrieved from *Box Office Mojo*, <http://boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=saw7.htm> [accessed February 2012].
[67] The words are from a spokeswoman for the British Board of Film Classification. See Shoard, 'A Serbian Film Becomes the Most Censored Film in 16 Years'.

unique being with a continuous mouth-to-anus alimentary tract, was passed uncut. The reason for the initial refusal of this sequel appears to be not the taboo around faecal consumption or even the histrionic carnage the film suggests, but the fact that it establishes 'clear association between pain, perversity and sexual pleasure'.[68] This conjunction of sexual abuse and violence mirrors, more generally, how the media have tended to read torture porn since *Hostel: Part II* and *Captivity* ignited controversy over their use of the female body in publicity posters.[69] Such critiques are largely misinformed and, in their decontextualisation of violence, miss the relevance of such moments within particular narratives. For example, the original *Hostel*, which also suffered from accusations of misogyny, presented three hyper-masculine and chauvinistic young men on sex holidays across Europe.[70] The drilling, slicing and finger-sawing they are later subject to gains significance when the viewer realises that the mechanisms of torture visited on their bodies are meant to replicate their previous reckless sexual exploits and, more specifically, their objectification of women through visits to brothels in Amsterdam and Bratislava.

However, for all the controversy that a handful of these films has caused, the explicit connection between extreme violence and sexual or misogynistic predation is atypical of most of the subgenre. *A Serbian Film* does indeed establish a link between sexual arousal and murder, but one would struggle to apply a similar logic to the *Saw*

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[68] The British Board of Film Classification, quoted in David Cox, 'Human Centipede 2: Why Do We Find the Digestive Tract So Hard to Stomach?', *The Guardian*, 7 November 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/filmblog/ 2011/nov/07/human-centipede-2-censorship-bbfc> [accessed February 2012]. Part of the controversy centred on a sequence where the madman wraps his penis in barbed wire before attempting sexual penetration.

[69] See, for example, Laura Woodhouse's complaint in her 'Hostel II: Misogyny Sells', *The F-Word: Contemporary UK Feminism*, 19 June 2007, <http://www.thefword.org.uk/blog/2007/06/hostal_ii_misog> [accessed January 2011].

[70] *The New York Times* called it 'one of the most misogynistic films ever made'. See Nathan Lee, 'We Hope You Enjoy Your Stay: Gore Is Served in the Cellar', *The New York Times*, 6 January 2006, <http://movies.nytimes.com/2006/01/06/movies/06host.html> [accessed February 2011].

series, which is doubtlessly the most popular torture porn feature.[71] The term 'torture porn' is, in fact, not accurate, as it suggests that horror, whether its subject matter may be of a sexual nature, has a pornographic function. In what follows, I ascribe to Jeremy Morris's proposition that the misnomer be replaced by the term 'torture-horror', which does not necessarily endorse torture as anything other than a 'source of horror' and thus short-circuits accusations of these films' possible portrayal of violence as titillating.[72] In fact, what is characteristic of this postmillennial horror subgenre, apart from its wide releases, media attention and high production values, is its investment in the imagery, cinematic techniques and mood of horror.[73] More broadly, this is what differentiates films that include graphic torture as part of their main plots, like *Rendition* (Gavin Hood, 2007) or *Unthinkable* (Gregor Jordan, 2010), from torture-horror. In the latter, torture is exploited for its capacity to affect bodies through elaborate sequences of extreme violence generally involving mutilation. In fact, films like the controversial *Grotesque/Gurotesuku* (Kôji Shiraishi, 2009) are proof that sometimes torture and its graphic display may become the main driving force of the narrative. Torture does not become an incidental subplot, but rather drives the film towards the climactic special effects or tension built around corporeal transgression.

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[71] There is no perceivable difference, for example, in the treatment of Amanda (Shawnee Smith) and Hoffman (Costas Mandylor) as Jigsaw's apprentices. Both are portrayed as weak and governed by selfishness. Similarly, most of the detectives are given similar screen time and are not traumatised by gender-inscribed realities. The series does, however, include as one of its few survivors a woman who was a victim of domestic violence. Her test asks her to kill her husband in order to leave behind the contraption that connects their bodies, an action that symbolises her need to break free from an abusive relation.

[72] Jeremy Morris, 'The Justification of Torture-Horror: Retribution and Sadism in *Saw*, *Hostel*, and *The Devil's Rejects*', in *The Philosophy of Horror*, ed. by Thomas Fahy (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2010), pp. 42-56 (p. 54).

[73] The inclusion of torture porn in the newest edition of Paul Simpson's *The Rough Guide to Cult Movies* (London and New York: Rough Guides, 2010), pp. 380-81, should perhaps go some way towards establishing the solidity of torture porn as an accepted subgenre of horror. However, whether torture porn merits the status of cult genre is an entirely different question and one which is at least arguable, particularly when most of its features have been worldwide box office successes.

To return to *A Serbian Film*, its banning in countries like Brazil, Norway and Australia was, not surprisingly, encouraged by the film's connection to pornography and paedophilia. Spain, whose Ministry of Culture had already given an X-rating to *Saw VI* (Kevin Greutert, 2010) and limited its release to adult cinemas because of its pornographic use of violence, banned *A Serbian Film* on the grounds that it constituted an attack on sexual freedom.[74] The controversy over the graphic scenes in such products has a sexual origin, but also an interestingly corporeal one: all the social taboos transgressed in *A Serbian Film* (incest, paedophilia, necrophilia) are centred on the body and its various socio-cultural specificities and inscriptions. In the case of incest, the body must necessarily be deemed familial (i.e. the basis of incest is that the persons involved are closely genetically related, but this does not alter the basic characteristics of their material bodies), the paedophile lusts after young bodies, and the necrophile seeks intimate contact with inert dead bodies. Given that both pornography and horror have been broadly understood as 'body genres' whose 'non-linear spectacles have centered more directly upon the gross display of the human body', it is logical that 'their display of sensations that are on the edge of the respectable' should be sometimes conflated and even confused.[75] However, this is not to deny that there may not be a clear voyeuristic investment in horror film, for scopophilia plays an important part in the spectatorial constructions of torture-horror. How then to apprehend its cinematic affect through corporeal transgression without reducing it to a mere 'power to excite'?[76] I would suggest that, at a remove, the genre is indeed connected to pornography, but not because it necessarily presents violence

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[74] Europa Press, '"*A Serbian Film* es un ataque directo a la censura y a la autoridad", dice su director', *El Mundo*, 11 November 2010, <http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2010/11/11/paisvasco/1289495203.html> [accessed February 2012].
[75] See Clover, 'Her Body, Himself', p. 189; Williams, 'Film Bodies', pp. 2-4.
[76] Williams, 'Film Bodies', p. 3.

as inviting or because it incites sadism.[77] Rather, in its will to see beyond what is either normally invisible or socially permissible, torture-horror shares a conceptual world with the forbidden fantasies of hardcore adult cinema. Linda Williams's work on the history of porn provides a perfect port of call for the investigation of the intricacies of the experience of torture-horror.

In *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the 'Frenzy of the Visible'* (1989), Williams sees the advent of film as a consequence of the 'will-to-knowledge of the body in movement' encouraged by early proto-cinematic machines like Muybridge's zoopraxiscope, that is, as a direct consequence of 'the desire to place the clocked and measured bodies produced by the first machines into narratives that naturalize their movements'.[78] The 'frenzy of the visible' caused by the late-nineteenth-century proliferation of machines of the visible, results in a deep interest in recording the unprecedented 'truths' of bodies – mainly their sexual side, which had until then remained invisible.[79] This desire to 'see and know more of the human body', already evident in early photographic studies of corporeal mobility and motility, turns into a search for realistic bodily representation and the secrets of the flesh.[80] The need for pornographic motion images even during the very early stages of cinema thus betrays a 'form of voyeurism structured as a cognitive urge', or what Gertrud Koch has called a 'drive for knowledge'.[81] Such a drive seeks for truth through the principle of 'maximum visibility', particularly of the images that have previously remained

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[77] There are more links between pornography and horror, but these are also of a broadly visual nature. For example, the circulation and availability of both is normally feared by sectors of society who feel that less responsible groups might misuse or be overly influenced (even persuaded) by their contents. This often leads to their public vilification (especially in the review sector), their restricted or limited release, and their censoring, unrating or banning.

[78] Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the 'Frenzy of the Visible'*, expanded edn. (London, Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 38, 36.

[79] Ibid., p. 7.

[80] Ibid., p. 36.

[81] Ibid., p. 48. Gertrud Koch, 'On Pornographic Cinema', *Jump Cut*, 35 (1990), 17-29, <http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC35folder/Kochporn2.html> [accessed February 2012].

beyond the reach of the potential consumer.[82] This is why porn can content itself with offering little or no narrative at all: the sight of bodies copulating, especially genitals offered in close-up, is enough to sustain interest. This is also the reason why the meat shot, normally referred to as the 'money shot', is so important to the porn industry. It is a firm proof of the truth of male pleasure and must therefore remain visible. If we follow Williams's theory of cinema as intrinsically embedded within carnal discourses of discovery, then pornography can be understood as the space where sexual perversions are imposed onto the filmic body. Instead of envisaging porn as a detrimental genre that might restage repressed sadistic desires, however, Williams proposes that we appreciate it for its heuristic value: 'fetishism and voyeurism gain[...] new importance and normality through their link to the positivist quest for the truth of visible phenomena'.[83]

It is precisely through a similar transvaluative process that we should explore torture-horror's fixation with the realistic visualisation of its organs and the violence visited upon its flesh. The visceral truth behind its images might thus establish a form of pornography of the open body, or 'porn-organ-phy'. After all, it is no coincidence that the Dutch torturer (Jan Vlasák) in *Hostel* turns out to be a failed surgeon who pays money to dissect fresh bodies, or that the walls in Jigsaw's studio are papered with anatomic posters in *Saw II* (Darren Lynn Bousman, 2005). Instead of apprehending the voyeurism inherent to the experience of torture-horror as springing from some type of obscure and repressed sadism, it is more productive to envisage it as a study of the effects of extreme violence upon the body. Such a corporeal curiosity to see and experience corporeal transgression vicariously would be in keeping with the zones of interconnection between spectator and film I developed in chapter one. This

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[82] Williams, *Hard Core*, p. 48.
[83] Ibid., p. 46.

would also substantiate the dialogue between mainstream horror and other contemporary cultural products that seem to point to a similar surgical interest. Damien Hirst's sliced formaldehyde cows, Gunther von Hagen's plastinations, or plasticised corpses open for anatomic inspection, and the success of TV series that feature detailed autopsies, like *CSI* (2000-present), or extreme cosmetic surgery, like *Nip/Tuck* (2003-2010), attest to the fact that torture-horror's visceral quality might not be a case in isolation.[84] Rather, torture-horror differs from those other products in the intensity and relevance given to the graphic images it plays with. If scholars have devoted some space to discussions of how the taste for terror has shifted to an interest in the architectural spaces of the open body in the past decade, it is still hard, at this stage, to discern whether torture-horror is responsible for a rise in the level of violence in the genre or whether it is just symptomatic of changes in what we consider transgressive, unwatchable or shocking sequences.[85] Either way, a certain desexualised pornographic interest in the wound is perceptible in most torture-horror.

Whilst I am totally opposed to reductive readings that see films like *Captivity* exclusively as forms of affective entertainment based on '[u]p-close mutilation, gang rapes, utter degradation, salacious filth, [and] unimaginable cruelty', it is nevertheless important to identify a certain fetishisation of violence in these films.[86] This is not a direct consequence of the subgenre's appeal to hidden sadistic wishes or a celebration of violence against specific bodies, particularly those of women. Instead, as I have

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[84] It is not coincidental that Natalya (Barbara Nedeljakova) and Svetalana (Jana Kaderabkova), the prostitutes that lure tourists into the torture industry in *Hostel* refer to it jokingly as an 'art show' or 'exhibit'.

[85] See Clive Bloom, *Gothic Histories: The Taste for Terror, 1764 to the Present* (London & New York: Continuum, 2010), p. 182; Fred Botting, 'Future Horror: The Redundancy of Gothic', *Gothic Studies* 1 (1999), 139-155; Xavier Aldana Reyes, 'Obsessed with Pain: Body Politics and Contemporary Gothic', in *Twenty-First-Century Gothic*, ed. by Brigid Cherry, Peter Howell & Caroline Ruddell (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), pp. 53-68.

[86] Kinsella, Warren, 'Torture Porn's Dark Waters', *Canada.com*, 7 June 2007, <http://www.canada.com/nationalpost/news/issuesideas/story.html?id=373ed690-d213-4bc1-bf9f-d84f53220e75> [accessed May 2010].

argued, an analysis of the spectatorial dynamics of such products reveals that torture-horror's attention to visceral 'truths' is more complex than would at first appear. The subgenre is concerned with violence, but its ambiguous visual alignments problematise identification. Similarly, the genre's own political awareness and self-referentiality sometimes turns the experience of watching torture-porn into an exercise in the ethics of witnessing the suffering of others. Foundational films like *Hostel* and *Saw* offer more localised case studies of the various viewing situations elicited by torture-horror and its affective workings.

Spectatorial Alignment and Realistic Violence in *Hostel*

Horror has always aimed to shock, sometimes by showing murder and death at their most disturbing, as the now classic tongue-cutting scene in the first gore film *Blood Feast* (Herschell Gordon Lewis, 1962) would seem to prove. Advances in special effects and bigger budgets have enabled the genre to have a much more visceral effect on spectators. In fact, the recent spate of remakes of some of the most successful rape-revenge and exploitation films of the 1970s and 1980s have tended to up the blood and body counts of the originals.[87] But torture-horror is also distinctive for the type of problematic spectatorial positions it proposes. Ambiguous alignments with both victim and attacker, coupled with ethical conundrums on the legitimate use of torture, ensure that the experience of watching a film like *Hostel* is far from straightforward. Actively encouraged to root for characters who are morally ambiguous and often switch roles from victim to torturer, viewers are put in the delicate situation of

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[87] See for example, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *The Hills Have Eyes* and *The Last House on the Left* remakes, and *I Spit on Your Grave* (Steven R. Monroe, 2010). The last decade has even seen films paying direct homage to exploitation cinema, as in the case of Quentin Taratino and Robert Rodriguez's *Grindhouse* (2007).

understanding plights they simultaneously condemn. This occurs, mainly, because the characters in films like *Turistas*, *Scar* (Jed Weintrob, 2008) or *The Tortured* (Robert Lieberman, 2010) refuse the usual channels of punitive law and impose their own versions of retributive justice. This chapter thus turns to the particulars of affect in *Hostel* and explores its novelty through the exploitation of two key elements: the ambiguous treatment of vicariousness and empathic feelings towards the victim(s), and the construction of realistic extreme sequence(s).

Eli Roth's *Hostel* starts by eliciting a sense of dread in the viewer through an opening credits sequence that features a half-glimpsed torture chamber. These first images set up the scene but do not reveal the particulars of the situation. In fact, part of the artistry in *Hostel*, as in other classics of affective corporeal horror like *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, 1974), resides in the structure and pacing of the action. When the torture sequences finally take place, they constitute a form of anticlimax anticipated by the build-up of tension and preclusion of specific images of violence.[88] After the credits scene, a mid-shot shows three men, two American fraternity students and an Icelandic 'drifter', arriving in Amsterdam. The nature of their trip is revealed when Paxton (Jay Hernandez) asks where they are headed and Oli (Eythor Gudjonsson) replies: '[r]ed-light district. Time for *sneepur*' ('sneepur' being the Icelandic word for 'clitoris'). After Josh complains that he has not travelled all the way from America just to smoke pot, and that they should attempt to do something that would be perceived as vaguely cultural, his suggestion that they visit a museum is met with sarcasm by the other characters. This is followed by a series of scenes that

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[88] The only hint that the main characters might be facing a particularly bloody denouement is the picture of Oli's face that appears twenty minutes into the film and is re-sent four minutes later to Paxton's mobile phone with a caption that reads 'I go home'. The camera follows the image into the torture chamber where it was taken and, by pulling outwards from the limits of the picture message, it reveals a table where the decapitated head rests. The alleged murderer is then seen walking towards his next victim. This moment is significant because it proves Paxton's suspicion that Oli's disappearance was a form of violent kidnapping but makes that knowledge exclusive to the audience.

further emphasise these men's objectification and 'meatification' of women: a 'cute' young girl who appears to be either autistic or heavily sedated is presented as a hunting trophy; Oli films himself having sex with a girl in a public toilet and then sends a picture text to the other men; an overweight woman on a balcony is called 'a fucking hog' and the possibility of sex with her compared to bestiality; and when the men finally reach the red-light district, Oli offers to pay for the services of one of the prostitutes, who is presented as a 'gift' to Josh. The obsessive hyper-masculinity asserted through the extreme sexualisation of female bodies comes not only at the expense of women, but also of gay men. When Josh proves unsuccessful with a couple of girls because he is wearing a bum bag, Paxton prompts him to 'go over and have fucking fanny-pack sex' with a gay man dancing nearby. Most tellingly, upon being thrown out of the club, Paxton warns the other men in the queue not to go there as it is a 'fag fest', 'wall-to-wall fucking cock'.

In a sense, affect in *Hostel* works through a straight reversal of the violence perpetrated onto female or feminised bodies by the men in the film. When Josh is initially offered the services of a prostitute, his reaction is to express his lack of enthusiasm: '[t]hanks, but paying to go into a room to do whatever you want to someone isn't a turn on'. The full significance of this statement, that the men who pay to torture and kill people through Elite Hunting are only a logical progression of the same exploitative business, only gains full significance after the end of the film or on a second viewing. The primary purpose of this scene is to present Josh as a sensitive man who would, at least naturally, shrink away from the type of power dynamics that prostitution involves. His image as a conscientious young man would seem to be reinforced by the fact that we soon learn he is trying to get over a bad break-up with his ex-girlfriend and that he is later referred to as 'the responsible one'. In the same

scene, a contrast is established between him and Paxton, who is seen telling Josh that the only way to 'get over [his] chick' is to 'bang some new pussy', and is immediately shown having a threesome with Oli and another prostitute. This latter shot focuses on the shadows projected by their heaving bodies and the hands of the two men as they meet over the body of the woman in a form of knuckly high-five. Its direct counter-shot, a shy Josh pulling away with a half-smile on his face after having turned down the offer to join them, would seem to suggest that he is governed not by naiveté but by a repression of a desire he cannot sublimate. This is reinforced by the fact that he proceeds to peevishly look at the silhouettes reflected on the other doors. In a twist of fate, the men who are now making use of the brothel (Oli, Josh and Paxton) will find themselves being tortured and reduced to their material bodies for the pleasure of other men with deviant desires in similarly sordid rooms. The film thus establishes an ambiguous relationship between the spectator and the main characters, who are not wholly sympathetic. This ambiguous feeling towards the men is also exerted through the incorporation of a very specific politics of difference through nationality.

Starting a trend that would continue with films like *Turistas* or *Borderland* (Zev Berman, 2007), *Hostel* parades the potential arrogance and racism of some Americans.[89] Europe is 'othered' as a dark continent where 'you can pay to do anything'. More specifically, the children in Slovakia are reported to 'commit the most crime', their women live off prostitution, there is no phone signal, the police are involved in crime rings and the only local attraction is the museum of torture. The film also plays with notions of cultural superiority to highlight the feeling of ambiguity towards the American men. For example, when Josh is thrown out of a nightclub for pushing a Dutchman and calling him a 'fucking faggot-ass elf', he shouts at the

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[89] See Kim Newman, 'Torture Garden', *Sight and Sound* 16 (2006), 28-31 (p. 30).

doormen that 'he is an American' and therefore 'has got rights'. This arrogance is met with a very particular form of nationally-inflected retributive violence later when Paxton's torturer needs to be shown that his victim-to-be is indeed an American before he will accept torturing him. This prerequisite is then revealed to be part of a larger business where the bodies of Americans are worth more than those of Europeans. The moment where Paxton is forced to speak and prove his nationality is, therefore, key; firstly because it objectifies the American man, making the moment of torture comparable to that of tasting wine at a restaurant, and secondly because the scene seems to support the idea that Europeans hold a grudge against Americans.[90] These racial tensions are picked up by Alexei, a young man who assures them that 'not everyone want [sic] to kill Americans' and that the girls in Bratislava 'love everyone foreign, especially American'. The ironic fact that Alex (Lubomír Bukový) turns out to be pimping men out, and not women, by sending them to their sure deaths, is cleverly complemented with a scene that features the failed Dutch surgeon joining the men on their train to Bratislava. After calling Josh a 'handsome American' and putting a hand on his lap, the Americans call him a 'fucking freak' and mock Josh for having finally 'hooked up'. In another of the film's many twists, this man will turn out to be Josh's torturer. The man's other apparent oddity, a preference for using his hands when eating, resonates at more than one level when he later appears in a full surgical gown and prepares the scene for the torture and dissection of Josh. This second sequence between the two men re-enacts the manual fixation of the Dutchman: he will use his hands to kill Josh, further objectifying him and revealing that the initial touch of his lap, as much as it may have been sexually coded, was also a very carnal

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[90] The film makes a point of showing the 'price list' written on the back of a business card: an American body is the most expensive to buy at $25,000 compared to that of Europeans ($10,000) or Russians ($5,000). It is unclear, however, whether this is due to specific grudges held against Americans or purely scaled on the basis of their exoticism. For example, the Asian Kana is presented as a rare treat ($50,000), presumably because she has been 'imported' from further away.

assessment of Josh's body. This is reinforced by the fact that, in the train, the Dutchman touches Josh after he has explained that modern societies have lost their relationship with food. The enigmatic line, 'I like to have a connection with something that died for me', spoken whilst the camera focuses on an incredulous Josh, already sets up, albeit inadvertently for the first-time viewer, the scene of their last encounter.[91] It is this specific scene which I want to discuss in further detail, as it provides a perfect example of the empathic feelings proposed by torture-horror in the extreme affective sequence.

The torture sequence between Josh and the Dutchman opens with a shot that aligns the camera with the POV of the former. The screen is completely dark but for a peephole that we soon understand is meant to represent someone's partially obstructed vision. This connection is facilitated by auditory cues: the inarticulate half-sentences uttered by a man's voice ('what the f...?'), which give away the fact that the person at hand is Josh, simultaneously reflect the potential spectatorial desire to know what is happening. Much like the characters in the film, the viewer has not yet learned what is taking place in the derelict and grubby setting, even if its look is reminiscent of the lugubrious chamber of the opening credits. The camera centres on the tables on each side and what appear to be surgical tools and various torture weapons. By affecting the image through jerky camera work and a sustained lack of focus, the scene attempts to represent the standard reaction of waking up in an unfamiliar place whilst simultaneously establishing a moment of heightened tension. The POV shot ends with the opening of the door and the glimpse of the by now familiar figure of the Dutchman. As he lifts up the hood covering Josh's face, the camera shifts to an objective mid close-up that is vaguely within the other man's visual field: it is offered

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[91] They also meet in a pub in Bratislava, where, after the Dutchman has saved him from the local children, Josh apologises for his previous behavior by returning the lap gesture.

from above and only Josh's face is visible. After the uncovering of Josh's head and torso, which has helped to develop the logistics of the scene, the camera pulls away to reveal his body strapped to a torture chair. The rest of the sequence is laden with a myriad different shots that establish anything but a straightforward spectatorial alignment: over-the-shoulder shots that include the torturer as he prepares his various implements would seem to encourage a certain sense of vulnerability and a victimisation of the spectator, but these are interspersed with counter-shots of Josh as he would be seen from a frontal position (i.e. a position closer to that of the torturer). Cut-in shots of Josh's handcuffed feet and hands disclose the particulars of his helplessness – like the camera, he cannot move or get away from the scene that is, slowly but surely, unravelling. This is reinforced by a return to his POV after the torturer picks up a drill. Such a directorial choice would seem to encourage identification with the victim, particularly since, as I have explained, Josh has been consistently portrayed as the most sensitive man of the three. However, this is frustrated through the use of long shots that approach and close in on Josh's bleeding body. These have a more predatorial feel and appear to align themselves with the visual field of the torturer. They are complemented by the moments where the different weapons are laid out on the table, these being shot from a mid-close up that would necessarily remain outside of Josh's field of vision.

Affect is generated here through four specific moments. The first and third are predicated on the extreme close-up: one of the shots shows the drill as it penetrates and twists the flesh in Josh's leg, and the other offers a quick shot of Josh's sliced Achilles tendons as they give way under the weight of his body. These are instances of the famous wound-as-face shot I discussed in chapter one, for in their total disembodiment created by the lack of a specific POV they can establish a special

vicarious connection.[92] The second moment of affect is constructed through a clever mixture of shots of the torturer shaking his hands in a ghostly fashion, counter-shots where Josh is seen reacting to it in a moment of abjection, and more removed long-shots that encase both images from an equal distance. Once again, there is no clear alignment with one given character. This is not to say that there is no privileging of a POV. Particularly towards the end of the sequence, there is an obvious move towards a more sustained spectatorial alignment – perhaps surprisingly, it is not an alignment with the torturer. The last moment of extreme affect is achieved through the creation of the tenuous possibility of escape for Josh. After having mutilated his feet, the Dutchman disappears from the shot, apparently leaving Josh to crawl his way out of the cell. Renewed POV shots bring the door closer until the Dutchman quickly rematerialises to finish the job. The final slitting of Josh's throat is presented through the reflection of a broken mirror that makes a final alignment ambiguous at best; since the image that is being returned features both heads within a short distance of each other, it is hard to ascertain whether either character is being privileged.

The significance of this scene, replicated in countless torture-horror features, but most notably in the death scenes of Lorna (Heather Matarazzo) in *Hostel: Part II*, and Mike (Skyler Stone) in *Hostel: Part III* (Scott Spiegel, 2011), goes beyond the mere sensational and establishes a difficult form of elusive spectatorial alignment. If, as we have seen, horror has traditionally been linked to a form of sadistic sublimation, torture-horror would seem to posit the basis of a new form of masochistic interplay. David Edelstein, generally credited with the coinage of the term 'torture porn' after his review of *Hostel*, expressed his frustration with what he saw as the purposely disconcerting agency games that forced him to take ambiguous viewing positions. In

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[92] I mean that there is no clear or topological viewer of this scene, as its extreme detail renders it impossible to align with either the vision of the torturer or that of the victim.

his own words: 'I didn't understand why I had to be tortured, too. I didn't want to identify with the victim or the victimizer'.[93] If the viewer is being visually tortured, as Edelstein professes, then this idea is incompatible with a sense of sadistic pleasure obtained from such a violence, unless we are prepared to understand the whole spectator/film relation as a process of consensual masochism.

Simultaneously, as I have argued, the process of watching torture-horror constitutes a re-staging of a different type of scopophilia: one completely bereft of repressed sexual tensions but ripe with a desire to see the body torn open. In this respect, torture-horror will always favour whichever spectatorial alignment offers maximum affect. This is why, for example, during Paxton's torture sequence, POV shots from both torturer and tortured are foregrounded to the point of being presented one after the other. An initial POV shot that aligns the field of vision with Paxton's reveals the figure of the torturer, now wielding a chain saw and ready to pounce. This is followed by another POV shot that aligns the camera with the torturer's vision as he lunges forwards towards the cowering victim. According to the principle of maximum affect, the death of the American client, Bob (Rick Hoffman), for example, comes as a relief. After a speech that pales in comparison to Paxton's chauvinistic objectification ('I've been everywhere and the bottom line is pussy is pussy'), Bob goes on to explain the thrill of the experience: 'this is something you never forget'. After Paxton meekly suggests that he might want to make the death of his victim a quick one, Bob summarises, more generally, the appeal of torture: 'I wanna feel it'. Such a diatribe might be applicable to the potential viewer constructed as a voyeur, as I will go on to explore in the next section, but only if such voyeuristic practices are perceived as masochistic in essence. According to this idea, the spectator may be seen as seeking

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[93] David Edelstein, 'Now Playing at Your Local Multiplex: Torture Porn', *New York Magazine*, 28 January 2006, <http://nymag.com/movies/features/15622/> [accessed January 2011].

'to feel' the experience from the perspective of the victim. The complicated alignments that torture-horror proposes replace the construction of an audience that condones on-screen violence with one where the audience takes personal pleasure in the 'lived' spectacle of pain.

Self-Reflexivity, Participatory Affect and the *Saw* Franchise

I have explored how a basic understanding of torture-horror would need to consider the subgenre's attempt to disturb not only through the traditional startle-effect or the build-up of tension, but also through the recreation of a scenario of physical torture riddled with ambiguity. This is by no means the only indication that torture-horror is a different breed of affective product from its dramatic or filmic predecessors. For example, when *Hostel*'s Josh opens the door to the dominatrix in the Amsterdam brothel, she understands that he is coming in to see her engage in S/M practices. As I explained in the opening to this thesis, her demand that Josh pay is indicative of the self-awareness that underlies the graphic displays of torture-horror features. A continued emphasis on the detrimental effects of voyeuristic practices and a reliance on surveillance culture feature in a large number of postmillennial horror films: the female ghost in *FearDotCom* (William Malone, 2002) exacts revenge on all users of the pay-per-torture website where she was murdered, and the torturer (Joseph Cross) in *Untraceable* (Gregory Hoblit, 2008) abducts subjects who were involved in the viral spread of images of his father's suicide in order to put them in deadly traps triggered by the number of on-line subscriptions to the website 'killwithme.com'. Some of these films have also adopted an aesthetic marked by decaying grey and sepia tones, grainy textures, and an amateurish finish, a distinctive look which Charles

Derry has seen as a particular 'sensibility of documentary suggestive of detention and wartime torture chambers as photographed with low-end camcorders'.[94] This post-9/11 aesthetic, with its hints towards real images of torture like those of Abu Ghraib, was popularised by the first of the *Saw* films, now the most profitable and successful horror franchise ever made.[95] Not coincidentally, this series is also deeply concerned with the nature of surveillance and provides an ambiguous critique of voyeurism that involves its visual exploitation. It is taken here as an example of the much wider plethora of torture-horror films and the self-reflexive spectacles of violence they propose.[96]

Jigsaw (Tobin Bell), John Kramer's criminal alter ego and main character in the *Saw* films, has been perceived as a merciful murderer and even as a normal citizen in the search for a just judiciary system.[97] Both mainstream and academic circles have received this character positively: a special *SFX* issue on monsters describes him as 'a misguided moral crusader, a terminal cancer patient who finds killing "distasteful"', and in an article on the skewed ethics of the *Saw* franchise, Jake Huntley deems Jigsaw's masterplan 'a strict personal philosophy based upon the will to survive and an appreciation of life'.[98] Such strong defenses of what is, in truth, little more than a

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[94] Derry, *Dark Dreams*, p. 312.

[95] It is important to note that *Saw* 'suppress[es] and marginalize[s] readings through which their scenes of torture might be related to real-world political contexts', thus becoming a text that 'circle[s] thematically around contemporary political controversies, without quite being "about" them'. See Matt Hills, 'Cutting into Concepts of "Reflectionist" Cinema? The *Saw* Franchise and Puzzles of Post-9/11 Horror', in *Horror after 9/11: World of Fear, Cinema of Terror*, ed. by Aviva Briefel and Sam J. Miller (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2011), pp. 107-123 (p. 108).

[96] The title of the only full-length study of the torture-horror phenomenon, Steve Jones' *Torture-Porn: Popular Horror in the* Saw *Era* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, forthcoming), would seem to substantiate the idea that the *Saw* series have been the most influential on subsequent horror films whose central subject is torture.

[97] Marriot and Newman comically deem him a 'zero-tolerance killer' in a recent guide to horror. See James Marriot and Kim Newman, *Horror: 333 Films to Scare You to Death* (London: Carlton, 2010), p. 323.

[98] Jordan Farley, 'The Top 20 Horror Villains: #8. Jigsaw', *SFX: Special Horror Edition*, February 2010, p. 29; Jake Huntley, 'I Want to Play a Game: How to See Saw', *The Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies*, 8 (2010), <http://irishgothichorrorjournal.homestead.com/SawHuntley.html> [accessed November 2011].

dubious murderous sophistry employing the false notion of choice as an excuse for retributive punishment, probably stem from the fact that Jigsaw is not exclusively presented as an enigmatic hooded figure with a knack for chaining victims to deadly contraptions. The franchise is concerned with portraying him primarily as a terminally ill old man who, in his rejection of what in *Saw V* (Darren Lynn Bousman, 2008) he calls a 'corrupt legal system that puts murderers back on the streets', moonlights as a social vigilante. The unorthodox but necessary qualities of his methods, understood as potential cures for his subjects, are given further credibility when juxtaposed with those of his vicious disciples: at least Jigsaw offers people a chance, or so the argument goes. The series has, since *Saw II*, gone to some considerable pains to legitimise Jigsaw's killings. Celebrity film reviewer and critic Mark Kermode recently expressed the opinion, rather emphatically, that the public who has bothered with the *Saw* franchise beyond its first installment is necessarily composed of either horror fans, people who appreciate its lack of quality, or 'glutton[s] for punishment'.[99] This gluttony for punishment is excused by the films themselves through the construction of an empathic and moral killer.[100]

But if the logic of creating a sympathetic killer is obvious when the intention might be to relativise the logic of violent spectacles, Jigsaw is soon discovered to be as fraught with ambiguity as the experience of watching torture-horror itself. Voyeurism, outside of the punishing remit and legal machinery imposed by Jigsaw – he forces his disciple Hoffman to watch the murders of his victims to see their moral

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[99] Mark Kermode, *The Good, the Bad and the Multiplex: What's Wrong with Modern Movies?* (London: Random House, 2011), p. 182.

[100] This formula is not the exclusive domain of torture-horror, and television series like *Dexter* (James Manos, Jr., 2006-present) have been quick to develop sympathetic murderer protagonists who justify their actions by telling themselves they only kill 'bad people'. My discussion here is somewhat simplified to suit the spatial limits of this chapter. For a more nuanced discussion on the contradictory moral messages of *Saw*, see my own 'Discipline... But Punish!: Foucault, Agamben and Torture Porn's Thanatopolitical Scaffold', in *Tortured Cinema*, ed. by Mark de Valk (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, forthcoming).

progression or failure – is saluted with particular cruelty and configured always as a form of social malaise. In *Saw IV* (Darren Lynn Bousman, 2007), in a scene shot in a chamber lighted entirely in red and reminiscent of the 'lust' murder in *Seven*, aka *Se7en* (David Fincher, 1995), Ivan (Marty Adams) is accused of voyeurism and beckoned to gouge out his own eyes with a couple of spikes strapped to a bed trap. His tape links voyeurism directly with victimisation and offers him the tools to salvation in the destruction of the 'eyes which have led [him] blindly astray'. Similarly, in *Saw II*, Michael (Noam Jenkins) is punished for making a living out of watching others: 'society would call you an informant, a rat, a snitch. I call you unworthy of the body you possess' is Jigsaw's comment this time. This test involves a mask on a spring timer that resembles a Venus fly trap and a choice between stabbing himself in order to extract the key from his eye socket or having his head crushed by the contraption's metallic spikes. His failure to so much as touch the ocular ball with the knife results in an affective death scene. Its last shot offers a close-up of Michael's face: the mask shuts hermetically and his open eyes stare straight at the camera as the blood dribbles from its orifices. The problematic link between the victim here, Michael, and the potential viewer of the film, who will also be constructed as a voyeur by the film itself, is taken to its most obvious and declamatory extreme in *Saw VI*. Tara and her son, kept captive in a cell and unaware of the determining role they will play in another man's life, spot a CCTV camera on the wall. Brent, the son, shouts 'someone's there. They're watching us', as the focal point of the camera shifts and offers a close-up of his face. Now reconfigured as the CCTV camera, the focal point stays fixed as Tara screams 'why? Why would someone do this?' Her interpellation is never qualified, thus leaving a door open to a potential critique of the audience who would get affective thrills from the suffering and destruction of others.

Postmillennial horror is particular self-referential in its choice of a camera-riddled cityscape that reveals the rotten cores of the buildings it purportedly defends. Its use of violence works as a critique of the manipulation and commercialisation of such images. Adam's (Leigh Whannell) tape in *Saw*, which accuses him of voyeurism and apathy, offers the intriguing line 'what do voyeurs see when they look into the mirror?' *Saw* uses this reflexivity to suggest a potentially difficult relationship between audience and product and a certain prefiguration of the ghost of scopophilic pleasure that may be derived from the consumption of affective corporeal transgression. Rigg, in *Saw IV*, is asked whether he can see what the killer sees, a question which is also deflected onto the viewers themselves. Is this then a simple case of the killer exposing his rationale for the killings, or could it be that the viewer is being challenged for the sensations potentially derived from watching scenes of graphic murder? Are we being aligned with the murderer himself, as happens in *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* (John McNoughton, 1986) when the viewer is forced to rewatch Henry's crimes from his own sofa? It would seem that torture-horror wants to have it both ways: the films act as critiques of the visual regimes of the early twentieth century, an idea I will go on to develop in the next section, whilst exploiting images of corporeal transgression for maximum affect. These films' self-awareness works by providing affect through the principle of maximum affect/visibility I proposed before (for example, the open cranium surgery scene in *Saw III*) and by appealing to the spectatorial drives of the viewer directly. Presenting the voyeuristic conundrum behind the enjoyment of any type of suffering alien to the viewing body, torture-horror complicates and compromises the supposed passivity of the role of the spectator.

The self-reflexivity that has concerned me in this section thus far is ultimately connected to the dynamics of a medium that trades in optical illusions. Such meta-commentaries on the audiences of torture-horror can be provided successfully because both parts (filmic and spectatorial) are aware that the on-screen bodies are fictional.[101] This is a direct product of the obvious but never explicit agreement that what is 'being seen' is not necessarily 'happening'. In this respect, cinema, like horror, is, from its very inception, a result of advances in technology and special effects that may simulate what has not or cannot take place. In a sense, film develops the early tricks of the Gothic stage to create affect through the suggestion of impossible images that would rarely be experienced in ordinary life. I have mentioned that part of the success behind films like *A Trip to the Moon/Le Voyage dans la lune* (Georges Méliès, 1895) is owed to a desire to bring the suggestive world of optical illusion into the territory of moving images. Such an affective need is complemented in torture-horror with the ever-present wish to implicate the spectator, and it has been taken one step further through the recuperation of a technique that was already popular in the 1950s, the shooting of horror in 3D film. This trend started with the ground-breaking remake of *House of Wax* (André de Toth, 1953), a horror film whose promotional posters included captions like 'it comes off the screen right at you!' and pictured the killer lunging at the audience. *House of Wax* was also the first 3D film with stereophonic sound, a technology that aimed at creating a sense of depth and immediacy that, like the 3D image, could guarantee a more immersive experience. Since then, a host of horror films has followed suit, most notably *Parasite* (Charles Band, 1982), *Friday the 13th: Part III* (Steve Miner, 1982), *Jaws 3D*, aka *Jaws III* (Joe Alves, 1983) and

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[101] The capacity of images of suffering to affect the viewer is obviously mobilised by the paradoxical fact that, in real depictions of the pain of others like war pictures, such images work to create sympathy and encourage altruistic action. See Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London and New York: Penguin, 2003), pp. 10-11.

Amityville 3D, aka *Amityville III: The Demon* (Richard Fleischer, 1983), which cautioned the spectator that '[i]n this movie you are the victim'.[102] In a bid to make the experience of watching horror even more corporeally involved, horror director William Castle combined these visual and aural advances with other site-specific gimmicks that relied on the physical space of the theatre. Viewers of *Macabre* (1959) were handed out life policies with Lloyd's Bank in case they should die of fear; *The House on Haunted Hill* (1960) included 'Emergo', an inflatable skeleton that would descend towards the audience on a high wire following a visual cue from the film; and *The Tingler* (1959) boasted of 'Percepto!', a buzzer that could make random seats vibrate when pressed.[103]

These extra-cinematic tricks resonate with the ethos of later postmillennial horror, which seems to have found a profitable vein to mine in 3D feature films. The incredibly successful slasher remake *My Bloody Valentine 3D*, the first horror film to be projected in RealD 3D, already warned its prospective audiences to 'prepare to witness the first 3D motion event to tear through the screen'.[104] The threat is combined by a clip that showed the average theatre audience cowering from the masked murderer, who throws a pickaxe directly at them. The promotional poster for *The Final Destination/Final Destination V* (2011), a film which grossed more than any of the other in the series, included a similarly incriminating poster: 'death has

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[102]   Caption   in   promotional   poster   on   *Imdb.com*, <http://www.imdb.com/media/rm2985008896/tt0085159> [accessed February 2012].
[103] Richard von Busack, 'Patrons Reading This Article Must Be Insured in Case of Death by Fright!!! William Castle, the Prince of Paltry Promotions, Returns This Week (in Spirit) at SF's Castro Theater', *Meatroactive Arts*, 12 October 1995, <http://www.metroactive.com/papers/metro/10.12.95/castle-9541.html> [accessed February 2012].
[104] RealD 3D is different from previous 3D technologies because it offers circular polarisarion, which improves the realistic feel of the image.

never been closer'.[105] Torture-horror has followed its steps closely. *Scar 3D* (Jed

Weintrob, 2007) was the first horror film to be shot in HD 3D, and *SawVII* received

public exposure mostly through its three-dimensional name, *Saw 3D*.[106] The various

captions in its promotional posters seem concerned with the alignment between

victim/spectator explored in previous sections of this thesis and which was already

obvious in 3D horror affairs of the 1950s, 1960s and 1980s. The most striking, which

featured a disembodied eye, claimed the film was available in 'eye-popping 3D', and

others highlighted its 'mind-blowing' and 'heart-pounding' qualities. But the most

widely distributed poster read 'the traps come alive in RealD 3D', something which

would seem to establish a direct link between the contraptions and spectatorial bodies.

This is an alignment that illustrates my previous expansion of ideas surrounding the

masochistic spectator in torture-horror, and it is one that was further probed in the

trailer for the film.

Saw 3D explores a side of the series that had remained untouched until then.

Focusing on a small rehabilitation group, the film tracks the traumatic consequences

and life-changing effects the traps have on the few survivors who pass Jigsaw's test.

As a film with a message, *Saw 3D* works to critique of misery TV culture, particularly

through the hypocritical figure of fake guru Bobby Dagen (Sean Patrick Flanery), who

leads the therapy sessions and writes a biography of an ordeal he never experienced.[107]

But beyond emphasising an aspect of the series that had remained neglected, the film

also established a connection between the idea of victimhood and survival through a

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[105] Caption in promotional poster in *Imdb.com*, [http://www.imdb.com/media/rm572177920/tt1622979] <Accessed February 2012>. The film grossed $157,887,643 according to *Box Office Mojo*, <http://boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=finaldestination5.htm> [accessed February 2012].
[106] Mr Disgusting, 'B-D Catches a Glimpse of 'Scar' in HD 3-D!', *Bloody Disgusting*, <http://bloody-disgusting.com/news/8780/> [accessed February 2012].
[107] Other films in the series can also be read as 'films with a message', particularly *Saw VI*, where a life-insurance company is punished for their corrupt dealings. Jigsaw's attack serves as a critique of the American health system.

reification of the potential danger extant in the experience of watching. The teaser trailer is particularly specific in this respect. It shows a typical cinema audience being trapped by their own seats as saws, a harpooned-vehicle and a pig-masked individual lunge towards them. The caption '[w]ill you survive until the end?' appears on-screen as a lugubrious voice announces that 'the last piece of the puzzle is you'. This threat is, needless to say, never fulfilled. The opening shot shows the extent of the experience: a woman is sliced in two and fragments of intestines are projected towards the audience in a 3D sequence that may afterwards be edited onto a 2D DVD release. The viewer cannot become a direct victim, even when sensorially bombarded, but this does not stop torture-horror from exploiting the consumption of affect by explicitly connecting images of corporeal transgression to the spectatorial body. Affect thus becomes an exploration of the representational limits of carnal annihilation. 3D only brings the moment of corporeal affect closer to viewers by appealing to their bodies directly.

Section 4. The Limits of Corporeal Transgression: Faux Snuff and Films about Snuff

'Today people want sensationalism. The more you rape their senses, the happier they are'.[108]

The general practice when discussing torture-horror is to focus on how viewers may be 'having their limits tested', whether these may be related to their threshold for violence, taste or obscenity.[109] I have not particularly deviated from this model, but rather complemented it with a detailed study of the participative paradoxes that the subgenre creates, as well as its promises of total involvement. In fact, I have suggested that watching torture-horror is not as simple as masochistically enduring images of mutilation and that the finished films are much more accomplished in terms of the spectatorial dynamics they establish. What I explore in the remaining two sections is how the experience of watching mutilation, of its screening, is also intimately related to a certain prodding of the limits of representation. More specifically, the first section focuses on faux snuff, a very specific type of product that tests the capacity of on-screen mutilation to pass for the real thing. Films like *August Underground* (Fred Vogel, 2001) are presented as found-footage of murders and torture, and they thus enact discussions of the incapacity for such images to be (i.e. if they 'are', they become illegal and must therefore 'stop being').[110] Exploring the safe distance

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[108] Television executive in *Cannibal Holocaust* (Ruggero Deodato, 1980).
[109] Brenda Cromb, 'Gorno: Violence, Shock and Comedy', *Cinephile: The University of British Columbia's Film Journal*, 4 (2008), 18-24 (p. 21).
[110] I am merely referring to the possibility of snuff as mainstream. There is no space here for a full discussion of the possibility of the existence of underground snuff films, but for contrasting opinions on the matter see David Kerekes and David Slater, *Killing for Culture: An Illustrated History of Death Film from Mondo to Snuff* (London: Creation Books, 1994), pp. 302-12, and Joel Black, 'Real(ist) Horror: From Execution Videos to Snuff Films', in *Underground U.S.A.: Filmmaking beyond the*

between screen and product, faux snuff collapses the filmic frame in order to become a direct mediation of violence. The second half of this section turns to films about snuff, which, in their attempt to interrogate the distance between viewer and product, constitute a form of culmination of the corporeal nightmares of torture-horror and their concern with self-reflexivity. In fact, in cases like that of *A Serbian Film*, which very specifically address the fears of accidentally partaking in the filming of snuff, torture-horror and the film about snuff collapse into each other.

Authenticity and the Limits of Representation

Dread (Anthony DiBlasi, 2009) is a clear post-*Saw* exploration of the limits of corporeal transgression and its representation, as well as a thinly-veiled look at the titillating quality of torture-horror. In this film, a student (Shaun Evans) decides to embark on an experiment to uncover the mystery of human fear. What starts as a rather mediocre and unyielding university project quickly turns into an obsessive tyrannical mission: the individuals who were previously questioned for research purposes are suddenly subjected to real-life nightmare scenarios where they are forced to confront and, the narrative seems to suggest, overcome the fears which oppress them. The student very carefully tapes and watches the result of such scenarios. As the film closes, the voice-over provides the tentative rationale for these sadistic experiments and the taping of extreme torture and death:

> Watching the fear of death, the pinnacle of all dread, approach, that was the limits. Someone once wrote that no man can know his own death, but to know the death of others intimately, to watch the tricks that the mind would surely perform to

avoid the bitter truth, that was a clue to death's nature, wasn't it? That might, in some small way, prepare man for his own death. To live another's dread vicariously was the safest, cleverest way to touch the beast.

The beast that cannot be tamed, but only toyed with and observed voyeuristically, is obviously death itself. In experiencing it vicariously, viewers may not just be facing the reality of death, but also managing to supersede it at a theoretical or imaginary level.

Georges Bataille had already argued a very similar point sixty years before. For him, transgression is always, by its very nature, contained, almost domesticated, and transgression without limits rare and transitory. Similarly, transgression never truly suppresses the taboo, but rather 'suspends' it; 'transcend[ing] it and complet[ing] it'.[111] The experience of the completed transgression thus, rather than efface the taboo itself, instead maintains the prohibition 'in order to benefit by it'.[112] Applying this theory to torture-horror reveals that these ideas are dialectically connected. Images of mutilation and death transgress an obvious social taboo: they expose and reintegrate death and pain into social life and entertainment where extreme violent phenomena are generally contained and hidden from view. What both torture-horror features like *Dread* and cultural theorists like Bataille seem to suggest is that what draws the spectator into this type of show is a desire to confront the taboo on death and thus overcome it. The futility of such an errand should become obvious: by consuming images of death, we do not, for obvious reasons, overcome death itself, but we do not overcome the taboo on death either. The taboo is not effaced, but merely lifted for the duration of the film, and it is in the very prohibitive nature of the images themselves

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[111] Bataille, *Eroticism*, pp. 36, 66, 63.
[112] Ibid., p. 38.

that this particular type of filmic transgression is completed. As spectators we have

benefited from what we have seen – the spectator has 'seen' the images and survived

– and we have managed to touch the beast without being eaten alive. A filmic

subgenre that aims to make this communication between viewer and product an even

more direct one is faux snuff, or fictional films that pretend to reproduce images of

real killings in the form of found footage. The taking of someone's life, particularly in

gratuitous or cruel ways, supposes the ultimate screen taboo both in ethical and moral

terms. Such is the territory charted by faux snuff.

The history of this horror subgenre is complicated, for it intertwines with that of

the mondo film, a genre equally 'obsess[ed] with open-wound sequences', the 'use of

slow-motion repeats, and its unflinching presentation of graphically disintegrating

human bodies'.[113] The mondo film is a type of documentary that treats sensational

topics and generally includes violent or shocking images like accidents and deaths, or

the killing of animals. This genre, best exemplified by *Mondo Cane* (Paolo Cavara,

Franco Prosperi and Gualtiero Jacopetti, 1962), is in itself far from straightforward.

Successful productions like *Faces of Death* (Conan Le Cilaire, 1978) and its many

sequels have famously interspersed images of real death with staged and acted

sequences. The initial difficulty that spectators experienced in trying to tell them apart

became, perhaps inadvertently, one of its main selling points, but some of the most

affective scenes, like one where a man is electrified on a chair, turned out to be a fake.

In a similar manner, a number of snuff films managed to pass for 'the real thing' and

become either very profitable enterprises or worthy of cult following.[114] Their claim to

authenticity certainly boosted sales of tickets and helped create an interest in B-

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[113] Mikita Brottman, *Offensive Films* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005), p. 134.
[114] I am using the umbrella term 'snuff films' in this chapter to refer to both films about snuff and faux snuff.

movies that would have otherwise been limited to a small circle of connoisseurs.[115]

The earliest example is that of *Snuff* (Michael Findlay, Horacio Fredriksson and

Simon Nuchtern, 1976), which christened the genre. Interestingly, the various

shooting incidents in the body of the film, composed mainly of material from a

previously unreleased feature called *Slaughter* (1970), failed to have the impact of its

last five minutes. This sequence, tacked onto the original ending, features a woman

from the filming crew being suddenly tortured (her hand cut off) and eventually killed

(her belly torn open and her guts extracted) as the camera men record the events in

'real time'. The extreme nature of the images, coupled with the fact that, at the time,

they were perceived to be believable, caused a stir that had feminists campaigning

against the film and authorities searching for the allegedly murdered actress.[116] As we

can see, the aesthetics of the snuff film differentiated itself from the beginning by

taking a more direct approach to mutilation. The last sequence in *Snuff* shares the

voyeuristic curiosity of the shocking documentary, or 'shockumentary', but it is also

unedited, rough and offers a murder premised exclusively on the desire 'to get it all'

on tape.

The appeal of the recorded murder in faux snuff replicates *Snuff*'s intention to

appear authentic. This is not only apparent in the techniques used in snuff films

themselves, but also the promotional campaigns that surround them. The release of

Ruggero Deodato's controversial *Cannibal Holocaust*, which chronicles the ill-fated

recording of a documentary about the habits of two native tribes of the Amazon, was

prefaced by an article in French magazine *Photo* that claimed real people could have

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[115] As has been noted, such a marketing move is also evident in the choice of venue, which changed from the more usual grindhouses or drive-ins to mainstream theatres. See Eithne Johnson and Eric Schaeffer, 'Soft Core/Hard Gore: *Snuff* As a Crisis in Meaning', *Journal of Film and Video* 45 (1993), 40-59 (pp. 41, 49).

[116] Julian Petley, '"Snuffed Out": Nightmares in a Trading Standards Officer's Brain', in *Unruly Pleasures: The Cult Film and Its Critics*, ed. by Xavier Medik and Graeme Harper (Surrey: FAB Press, 2000), pp. 203-20 (p. 206).

been killed in the making of the film.[117] Incidentally no humans had been harmed, but

the various scenes depicting real violence against animals proved problematic.[118]

Similarly, the sequel to the first *Guinea Pig* film, the Japanese *Flower of Flesh and*

Blood/Ginî piggu 2: Chiniku no hana (Hideshi Hino, 1985), allegedly shocked actor

Charlie Sheen to the point that he reported the tape to the authorities.[119] The film,

which runs for less than an hour, is composed of a stalking scene, a prolonged

dissection of the body of the female victim, and a coda that seems to suggest the

murderer is still out there looking for more test subjects. Whether out of social

obligation or merely to capitalise on the sensationalism caused by the charges of real

murder, the distributor soon released *The Making of Guinea Pig*, which revealed the

set, actors and special effects used in creating the extreme sequences. Including the

footage of real animal killings or an incredible attention to detail in the mutilation

scenes are two obvious affective techniques used in faux snuff. Much as in the *Mondo*

Cane genre, part of the potential pleasure to be gained from the viewing of the films is

what Steve Jones has called the process of 'prob[ing] the image for signs of fakery'.[120]

If the film's images prove unconvincing, affect will tend to be replaced by skepticism,

but if they look and feel like what the social imaginary sees as the real thing, they can

have a strong effect on viewers.

August Underground and its various sequels have trodden similar ground in recent

years, bringing the degree of debauchery and social compromise of faux snuff to new

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[117] Julian Petley, '*Cannibal Holocaust* and the Pornography of Death', in *The Spectacle of the Real: From Hollywood to Reality TV and Beyond*, ed. by Geoff King (Bristol and Portland: Intellect, 2005), pp. 173-85 (p. 174).
[118] Ibid., p. 183.
[119] Kerekes and Slater, *Killing for Culture*, p. 227. Whilst the veracity of this story has not been challenged as such, some critics have started to intimate that the story shows the makings of an urban legend. See Colette Balmain, 'Flesh and Blood: The Guinea Pig Films', *Asian Cinema* 22 (2011), 58-69.
[120] Steve Jones, 'Dying to Be Seen: Snuff-Fiction's Problematic Fantasies of "Reality"', *Scope: An Online Journal of Film and Television Studies*, 19 (2011), 1-22 (p. 14), <http://www.scope.nottingham.ac.uk/February%202011/Jones.pdf> [accessed December 2011].

levels of exploitation and popularity.[121] The use of grainy images, hand-held

camerawork and sequences meant to look like they have been taped over less

titillating and transgressive images obviously attempt to create the effect that 'the tape

is sourced from a long line of duplicates' and foreground the fact that home video

equipment has been used in their creation.[122] The extreme graphic quality of some of

the scenes, such as the torturing of Laura in the first film or the necrophilic infanticide

and enforced self-castration in the sequel *August Underground's Mordum* (Jerami

Cruise, Killjoy, Michael Todd Schneider, Fred Vogel, Christie Whiles, 2003), are

reinforced by the long realistic takes that make the use of editing tricks difficult. For

example, in the first film one of the actors (Kyle Dealman) would appear to actually

force himself to vomit, since the sequence at no point occludes his face and he is

shown talking throughout.[123] The fact that the constant shooting does not allow for

effects like the stop-track motion puts enormous pressure on the recording of

individual scenes. The artistry of the film thus relies on a clever use of prosthetics,

partial occlusions, shots that are out of focus and, as in the case of the vomiting or the

various sequences that include volitional piercings, tattooing and self-harming, real

instances of extreme corporeal assault.[124] The last in the series, *August Underground's*

Penance (Fred Vogel, 2007), already shows signs of the self-awareness of mediatic

horror that will concern me in the next section. Both killers seem utterly bored with

the endless wave of annihilation they perpetuate, and the various scenes featuring

impotence, lack of interest in each other and constant fights point towards the

exhaustion of their pointless enterprise. The ambiguous ending, where the female

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[121] The pseudo-documentary *S&Man* (J.T. Petty, 2006), which includes interviews with Carol J. Clover, calls the series 'one of the most sought after in the underground world'.

[122] Jones, 'Dying to Be Seen', p. 6.

[123] This is repeated in the second film, where two women are forced to vomit by having fingers pushed down their throats in order to trigger the gag reflex. In fact, the line between this film and humiliation pornography is very thin.

[124] Cristie's (Cristie Whiles) arm cutting scene is allegedly real and was used for her own therapeutic benefit. Fred Vogel, interviewed in *S&Man*.

killer appears to strangle herself, seems an adequate coda for the franchise: the only way out of this eternal circuit of recorded murder is by taping one's own death, *Peeping Tom* style. The fact that the camera is not able to follow Cristie on her final fall is precisely what makes the ending so telling. For a series that has placed so much interest in the detailed defiling of the victim's body, the decision to make its only potentially meaningful death an off-screen affair can only instill frustration. The viewer has, by then, got used to a filmic regime where death needs to be recorded to be believed, where screening is the only marker of presence. In a sense, faux snuff pushes corporeal transgression into a zone where reality and fiction blur, making viewers demand believable on-screen mutilation as proof that characters are indeed dead.

In engaging with the representational politics of corporeal transgression and simulating mutilation to the point where it might be indistinguishable from real violence, faux snuff thus takes affective entertainment to its limit. As we have seen, the impact of these films, their affective quality, might reach beyond the corporeal spectator/body on-screen schema that I have so far considered to have a direct impact on society. The fact that a famous actor decided to denounce *Flower of Flesh and Blood* as a piece of recorded murder shows how faux snuff, when convincingly executed, can destabilise the boundaries between safe and contained entertainment even have a wider effect or repercussions. What I am arguing is not necessarily that faux snuff questions the ethics of the consumption of this type of extreme product, although this is also partly true. My contention is that, in its capacity to affect audiences beyond the here and now of their safety – part of the controversy of these films lies in the fact that, in their claim to authenticity, they could really be happening

– they challenge the politics of representation themselves.[125] It is not merely that spectatorial bodies are affected organically according to the BwO framework, but that, in the cases where faux snuff is presented as a real instance of found footage, the films are deliberately positioning themselves at the threshold between the work of fiction and real violence. In presenting themselves as shows centred on mutilation, these films do not only appeal to the corporeality of the potential spectator, but also to their capacity to believe and react to the images presented. Representation is thus exploded precisely through extreme authenticity. Faux snuff in such circumstances is so powerful as to move beyond the limits set by the viewer/film contract established through the decision to watch a film.

Precisely because faux snuff introduces itself to the viewer as non-fiction, through very specific aesthetic and directorial choices, its claim to authenticity can feel stronger. The extrication of these films from their fictional packaging and setting, for example encountering images or clips on-line, further accentuates their affective potential. Viewers are aware when they enter a cinema theatre that they are engaging with fictional images.[126] The same cannot be said for videos they may come into accidental contact with.[127] As a rising number of home-made videos find channels of distribution on-line through 'youtube' or other streaming sites and monitoring of such materials becomes virtually impossible, the threat that users might come across the

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[125] For more on the logics of the representation of real and fake death, see Vivian Sobchack, 'Inscribing Ethical Space': Ten Propositions on Death, Representation and Documentary', in *Carnal Thoughts*, pp. 226-57.

[126] The film may choose to present itself as a documentary or found footage, as I have explained before, but this does not affect the point I am making. In such cases the films are choosing deliberately to move away from their fictional frames so that they may have the same impact as material encountered by accident.

[127] I am not merely referring to the fact that Internet users might accidentally come across a faux snuff clip on unrelated searches through alternative suggestions potentially made by the browsers or searching engine, but also to on-line vandalism like sending links to shock sites. See Steve Jones, 'Horrorporn/Pornhorror: The Problematic Communities and Contexts of Online Shock Imagery', in *Porn.Com: Making Sense of On-Line Pornography*, ed. by Feona Atwood (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009), pp. 123-37.

recording of true murder images turns into a reality. *Eden Lake* (James Watkins, 2008) can be particularly scary precisely because 'happy slapping', or the recording of public beatings on mobile phones, was a real source of social anxiety in Britain at the time of its release. For example, David Morley, a survivor of the Admiral Duncan bombings in London, was killed in 2005 after a gang of youths beat him to death and recorded the crime on a mobile phone.[128] Their alleged intention to sell the resulting video for financial gain would have turned this violent episode into the first recorded instance of real snuff in the UK. In a time when cheap modes of recording are widely available, the making of a snuff film becomes so ubiquitous that it can take the form of a simple '.avi' file on someone's private mobile phone. The fact that films like *Eden Lake* have started to explore the implications of such acts of violence is a direct result of the fact that, as Julian Petley has suggested, access to images of real death in the media has to be 'ethically justified'.[129] Access to such content is necessarily 'constricted by the various taboos surrounding "real" death', and this is fodder for the imagination of filmmakers who capitalise on the potential demand for such materials.[130] The interest of films like *Eden Lake* lies in the fact that faux snuff creates a sense of corporeal threat through an alignment of its violation and the potential misuses new recording technologies may be put to. It is however the genre's cousin, the film about snuff, that can use its metatextuality to offer a more nuanced analysis of the implications of mediated affect.

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[128] Sandra Laville, 'Happy Slap Gang Guilty of Killing Barman in Clockwork Orange-Style Violent Spree', *The Guardian*, 15 December 2005, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2005/dec/15/ukcrime.sandralaville> [accessed December 2011].

[129] Petley, '*Cannibal Holocaust* and the Pornography of Death', p. 183. See also his 'Let the Atrocious Images Haunt Us', in *Tell Me Lies: Propaganda and Media Distortion in the Attack on Iraq*', ed. by David Miller (London: Pluto, 2004), pp. 164-75. In the latter he focuses on the censorship and ethical use of the images of death circulated during the 9/11 and the invasion of Iraq.

[130] Ibid. This clearly refers to the ban on 'visual records of death'. See Black, 'Real(ist) Horror', p. 64.

Snuff-Movie, Mediated Affect and the Horrors of On-Line Violence

'People love to see death. Why do you think the ratings are so high on those reality

disaster shows?'[131]

I have already suggested the benefits of apprehending the type of scopophilia torture-horror proposes as a non-gendered form of affective curiosity interested in the opening up of the body. Such a reading understands the violence visited upon screen bodies as not necessarily misogynistic even when directly aimed at women. This is partly because women are very rarely the *only* subjects under attack in torture-horror, but also because, as I have argued, the emphasis is placed on the act of violence and mutilation itself and involves a complex system of spectatorial alignments. This line of thought would initially seem more difficult to sustain with the film about snuff, since the female body is more obviously the exclusive victim.[132] For example, *Snuff 102* (Mariano Peralta, 2007) circles around the painfully detailed torture and murder of two women, and *Thesis/Tesis* (Alejandro Amenábar, 1996) tells the struggle of one woman to uncover a ring of illegal tapes made by and for violent males. The early *Hardcore* (Paul Schrader, 1979) goes as far as to very specifically align the potential audiences for these films with the male gaze. In the triple-X cinema scene, where a worried father (George C. Scott) infiltrates a ring of extreme pornography in order to find out whether his daughter (Ilah Davis) has been executed in a snuff film, the audience is homogeneously portrayed as wealthy, middle-aged and male. Recent films like *Terror Trap* (Dan Garcia, 2010), which have included women amongst the

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[131] Detective Mike Reilly (Stephen Dorff) in *FeardotCom*.
[132] This is further complicated by the fact that pornography itself has traditionally been perceived, particularly by feminists, as a form of violent misogyny itself. See Carol Avedon, 'Snuff: Believing the Worst', in *Bad Girls and Dirty Pictures: The Challenge to Reclaim Feminism*, ed. by Alison Assiter and Carol Avedon (London and Boulder: Pluto Press, 1993), pp. 126-30 (p. 126).

intradiegetic viewers of snuff, suggest that conceptions of potential consumers are changing and becoming less gender-specific, but the posters for films like *The Great American Snuff Film* (Sean Tretta, 2003) and *Snuff Killer/La Morte in Diretta* (Bruno Mattei, 2003) still show the eroticised female body as the main victim of the film about snuff.

Whilst the examples of these specific products are telling in themselves, they say more about social constructions of the snuff film (i.e. fantasies of what it might entail) than the potential products themselves. *Hardcore*, in its exposition of snuff as a form of violent pornography made cheaply for male consumption, reflects popular and socially accepted views on the subject.[133] However, as Linda Williams has pointed out, the original *Snuff* cannot be considered pornography 'unless the fantastic special effects of exploitation horror films are included in its definition'.[134] Films about snuff can offer high visceral thrills unconnected to sex, as in the bed torture scene in *Last House on Dead End Street* (Roger Watkins, 1977), or more evident explorations of the links between the female body and the male gaze, as in the violence-cum-pornography of *Bloodline* (Terence Young, 1979) or *Mute Witness* (Anthony Waller, 1994). But if the violence does to a certain extent become a fetish, these films very rarely draw a direct bridge between sexual pleasure and that of killing.[135] This is to say that films about snuff rarely aim to arouse the viewer sexually in their depictions of gore or blood, but rather focus on the problematic and deranged feelings of characters like the eponymous murderer in *Henry: Portrait of Serial Killer*. The use of corporeal transgression in films about snuff is therefore variable, since the films might not

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[133] See, for example, documentaries like *The Dark Side of Porn: Does Snuff Exist?*, dir. by Evy Barry, *Channel 4*, 18 April 2006.

[134] Linda Williams, *Hard Core*, p. 190.

[135] As Steve Jones explains, not even faux snuff sexualises violence, since its main aim is to horrify and scare. Whilst snuff itself might come from such a sadistic desire, the same cannot be said for films like *August Underground* and *Flower of Flesh and Blood*, which seek to shock and disturb. See Steve Jones, 'Dying to Be Seen', p. 3.

always belong to the horror genre. *8mm* (Joel Schumacher, 1999) and *Vacancy* (Nimród Antal, 2007) are primarily thrillers, and therefore not as interested in affective corporeal transgression, but rather the creation of suspense. It is the film about snuff which also inscribes itself within the general conventions of horror that concerns me in the rest of this chapter.

Because the horror film about snuff is not attempting to look or pass for a real snuff tape, the spectatorial process it entails is a very different one.[136] The narrative tends to be more complex and nuanced, since the camera is not bound exclusively to the here and now of its holder. It also shows artistic and cinematographic detail, a polished and high-quality end-product more characteristic of Hollywood productions, and which would be difficult to find in a home-made tape or digital recording.[137] The horror film about snuff therefore necessarily situates itself as both a mediated and mediating product. In terms of its capacity to mediate violence, the images of mutilation it chooses to display are presented as intradiegetically real. The characters react to them, but the material is delimited by the filmic frame and its presentation within a larger narrative that is not an actual snuff film. With regard to its nature as a mediated product, the horror film about snuff is also presented as fictitious itself: *Snuff 102*, for example, is sold as fiction and an investment in the veracity of its images is necessarily precluded by various cinematic elements like captions, inserts, complex

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[136] The film *The Poughkeepsie Tapes* (John Erick Dowdle, 2007) is perhaps the only exception. Presented as a documentary that includes images from a killer that recorded most of his crimes, the film only gives away its fictitious quality when the credits appear at the end.

[137] This is sometimes avoided through the use of deliberate poor quality, shaky or low definition sequences. In the case of *Snuff 102* this aids the realistic approach to the most shocking scenes in two ways. Firstly, it shows an interest in portraying the images of snuff as faux snuff through a replica of the supposed aesthetics of a home-made snuff tape. Secondly, the grainy and rough quality of the image often impairs the vision of the actual wound. This means that less costly special effects can be used without a major affective loss.

camera moves, etc.[138] This is a situation more generally explored in the film about snuff and its investigation of the complicated process of watching such material. *Hardcore*'s theatre scene, for instance, is composed of shots of Kirsten's father watching the snuff film and countershots of what is being played. This set-up allows the viewer to see the exact reactions the images produce in the intradiegetic consumer, thus potentiating the intended reaction the scenes may produce in the film's own viewers. These films also often challenge spectators more directly, breaking the cinematic fourth wall and, in their admonition of affect, incriminating them. *Funny Games* (Michel Haneke, 1997) questions its viewers halfway through the film, asking them whether they have had enough, and the award-winning *The Last Horror Movie* (Julian Richards, 2003) goes as far as to threaten to kill the supposed video watcher if they do not stop the tape. Another film that aims to implicate its potential audience is *Snuff-Movie*, a little-known UK film that uses the self-reflexive-yet-exploitative nature already discussed with regards to torture-horror in order to critique the problematic relationship between the mediation of violence – the process of its generation, transmission and reception – and the film about snuff.

Snuff-Movie's interest in exploring the boundaries between reality and fiction, between fabrication and mediated 'truth', is evinced through its metatextual interplay of different narrative layers which undermine each other and foreground the artificiality of the final, supposedly 'real', product. For example, the film opens with a voiceover from the director Boris Arkadin (Jeroen Krabbé) promising that what follows is the 'most shocking, most explicit, most terrifying' material he has ever made, and that 'all the violence, all the suffering, the horror, all of it, will be real'.

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[138] When horror films truly try to pass for the real thing, as happened with *The Blair Witch Project* (Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez, 1999) or *Paranormal Activity*, the opening and end credits are normally edited out in an attempt to present the film as acinematic (i.e. not a film).

This claim to authenticity is, however, instantly disavowed by *Snuff-Movie*'s introductory episode, which borrows aesthetically from the Hammer Horror series and features a post-Caesarean mother coming back from the dead as an angry, childless vampire. The film then moves on to another highly contrived sequence that potentially recreates the killing of Polanski's pregnant wife, Sharon Tate, at the hands of the Manson family. The sequence stands out from the previous one because some of its shots look grainy and off focus. Seeking to replicate the look and feel of watching images recorded on a hand-held camera, all sound is subsumed by the loud running of the filmic reel, which once more points towards *Snuff-Movie*'s desire to present itself as an elaborate counterfeit. The murder of Mary Arkadin is followed by a documentary in which the reporter seems to voice the film's own concerns: '[e]ach year over a billion people go to the movies. For most, the two-hour escape ends when the lights come up, but for some, the line between reality and fiction blurs'. It is then revealed that the teenagers who murdered Mary had been watching the film presented as *Snuff-Movie*'s opening sequence, now appropriately named 'Premature Burial' and shown to be starring the deceased Mary herself. The second sequence happens to be the found footage of the snuff movie they were recording the night of the killing spree. But if this were not confusing enough, the sequence also turns out not to be offering the spectator the final 'real' film either. As the camera pulls away from the television set, a couple reclining on a sofa become its central focus. The rest of the film chronicles the fate of the woman, Wendy Jones (Lisa Enos), as she herself becomes an accidental participant in a snuff Internet website.[139]

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[139] The fact that both Wendy Jones and Mary Arkadin are played by the same actress, and that Wendy Jones is hired to play Mary for Arkadin's new film, contributes to the Chinese box structure of *Snuff-Movie*.

Peer-to-peer file share networks and websites that facilitate access to graphic pictures or videos through the Internet have often been contested for their potential complicity in acts of sadistic voyeurism and scopophilia. A site with shock content like 'Rotten.com', which specialises in pictures of dead people and fatal accidents, has been sued in the past by relatives of the deceased, and some newsgroups in the 'Usenet.com' discussion boards were forced to shut down by the police under accusations of child porn distribution.[140] Recent studies have also shown that extreme pornography is on the rise and that the availability of obscene and illegal material is also sometimes enforced onto the unknowing Internet user through fraudulent links to 'shock sites'.[141] Similarly, the plots of recent torture-horror features like *FeardotCom*, *The Poughkeepsie Tapes* or *Untraceable* revolve around the possible misuses of new and more immediate systems of image recording and file sharing. Like torture-horror, a similar subgenre, films about snuff offer a window onto the ways in which contemporary horror negotiates social anxieties regarding the mediation of violence whilst simultaneously exploiting its affective qualities.[142] *Snuff-Movie* is by no means the first film to venture into this area, taking its main premise from a previous Canadian film, *My Little Eye* (Marc Evans, 2002). The latter, shot entirely through a CCTV-system, already tried to generate horror through its literalisation of the fears that surrounded the TV programme *Big Brother* when first broadcast in the late 1990s

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[140] Yaman Akdeniz, *Sex on the Net: The Dilemma of Policing Cyberspace* (Reading: South Street Press, 1999), pp. 22-6.

[141] Robert Jensen, *Getting Off: Pornography and the End of Masculinity* (Reading: South Street Press, 2007); Steve Jones, 'Horrorporn/Pornhorror', pp. 130-4. "Shock sites" are different from sites with shock content in that the latter are accessed willingly by users, who have to search for the extreme images themselves. The former are normally used to shock users through a confrontation with unexpected obscene and even illegal material, and tend to be 'comprised solely by the image/video itself' (p. 124).

[142] In fact, the film makes a point of telling its potential viewer that this is the case. As the report of Mary's murder inevitably leads to speculations about the motives and their connection to the killers' passion for horror films, the documentary explains that 'people talk about horror films as [...] having a negative impact and [...] turning kids on to violence. I think what some people tend not to notice is that horror films, by definition, are the only genre films that encourage negative reaction to the violence that they depict'.

by featuring a series of contestants who are unaware of their participation in a snuff film. *Snuff-Movie* takes this premise one step further. What starts as a horror film – the intradiegetic director, Arkadin, makes it very explicitly that his aim to 'horrify' and 'create intense fear' – soon turns into a digital nightmare. The rooms are monitored with cameras and a CCTV-system that is directly connected to the Internet. The deaths are recorded in real time and streamed at 'snuff-movie.com'. This website is shown on google's search engine as 'Boris Arkadin's latest masterpiece in progress', featuring 'over 50 live cams of continuous horror'.

Snuff-Movie thus proposes a traumatised man's vision of the perfect horror film through a reality TV nightmare scenario facilitated by the Internet. When Mary questions the director about the unusual recording process of the film, he logically contends that the crew has 'gone the way of all overmanned archaic technology, supplanted by machines, and the audience [is] hopefully still out there in the dark, watching'. The cameras in this self-professed 'house of death' can see the people, but also what they are seeing. This provides for the perfect voyeuristic experience and, as with the DVD version of *My Little Eye*, the audience is given the option of watching the moment of death from various angles and POVs that they can choose from. Accordingly, and in the interest of maximum exposure when a murder is anticipated, the system prompts the user to jump directly to the director's cut. The film seems to imply that this controlled version of the experience searches for the cameras and angles that will provide the most lifelike mediation of the moment of death. Once the victim has been snuffed out, the free website automatically offers the user the possibility of a replay. Most controversially, the only website user in the film, who happens to be Wendy's own boyfriend, is portrayed surfing the Internet for pornography prior to his search for Arkadin's project.

Snuff-Movie also emphasises the pornographic appeal of the website by literally undressing Wendy in her initial interview for the role. During her audition she is forced to strip down because 'there is a nudity content in the film' and the director is more likely to choose her if he is sent a full-frontal shot. This video, edited so as to make Wendy appear more licentious, is then uploaded onto the snuff website without the actress' content. The link between both types of gaze, voyeuristic and morbid, is thus cemented. In this respect, the aforementioned sofa scene is intriguing for its suggestion that the type of scopophilia that leads to virtual snuff films is inseparable from new digital technologies. As the lovers start having sex on the sofa, the shot cuts to a zoom-in of the green light of their DVD-player. The scene then cuts to a counter-shot that frames the heaving figures of the lovers from the POV of the device – we know this because the edges of the image have been obfuscated, giving the shot the telescopic look of a round lens. This scene does not have a direct relevance on the later action because no-one is revealed to have been spying. Instead, it would seem to have been added for the sole purpose of signalling that voyeurism lies at the heart of the digital experience. This scene is complemented by another where Wendy is followed by a disembodied camera into a cubicle and another where the same camera/screen eventually catches up with her as an acorporeal beam of light. The film seems to be acknowledging the types of spectacles digital technologies encourage, because they necessarily culminate in a monitoring and policing of people by disembodied entities that may pose a very real threat to their lives.

Ultimately, films about snuff like *Snuff-Movie* expose the danger that unlimited access to images and videos of all types might lead to deregulated exploitative ventures like Arkadin's. These films also interrogate the line that separates fiction from reality. *Snuff-Movie* goes beyond the mere postmodern gesture of having the

film's own actors, who are performing in Arkadin's film, acknowledge that they are indeed actors 'in a film'. In a scene where Wendy is being attacked by the group of teenagers who killed the original Mary, the other actors stop in their tracks, incapable of distinguishing whether what seems to be taking place is authentic. As Leon (Hugo Myatt) puts it, 'of course, you know that's not really happening. I mean, I know it's happening, but Wendy's only acting'. This line reflects the type of experience that I propose snuff films are trying to portray. The authentic quality of the website is further complicated by the fact that its supposed 'reality' deems it unbelievable. When Wendy's boyfriend runs to the police, these are quick to reject his claim to search Arkadin's house on the ground that the website looks predictable. When Andy (Alastair Mackenzie) complains that what he has seen looks 'unfakeable', one of the policemen suggests that it might have been created with some 'new digital technology' and that there should be no reason to explore the matter any further. When the authorities are finally persuaded to circle the premises, the deaths are revealed to have been acted, much to the surprise of the spectator.

It is perhaps a truism by now to say that new technologies are reconfiguring traditional perceptions of life and freedom; philosophers like Paul Virilio or Jean Baudrillard have dedicated extensive careers to charting these changes and their detrimental consequences on the human subject. The rise of privacy settings in networking sites like 'Facebook' and the mediation of events such as 9/11 would seem characteristic of an inextricable dependence on systems of image control in keeping with the logic of 'control societies'.[143] In Western countries, where the installation and monitoring of security cameras is mandatory for most businesses, scopophobia, or the morbid fear of being watched by others, has come to define the contemporary

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[143] Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations 1972-1990*, trans. by Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 178.

subject.[144] The computerization of trade through Internet shopping has also sparked interest in the possible culture of surveillance behind the boundless freedom and choice that such digital technologies seemingly promise. As Dean Lockwood has explained, '[c]omputer-tracked swipe card access and credit-card based consumption can also be considered a sort of electronic tagging, introducing openings and closings we can never guarantee'.[145] Given the zeitgeist, the foregrounding of CCTV cameras in the *Saw* franchise, and the torture auctions in *Hostel: Part II*, the ease with which an Internet snuff *Big Brother* can be created in *Snuff-Movie* should not come as a surprise. These filmic examples surely seek to question the potential misuse of monitoring systems and the ease with which Internet users may now upload and access real instances of violence such as Al-Qaeda's on-line beheadings or the execution of Sadam Hussein in 2006 – not to mention the more directly participatory on-line experiences of death offered by some American prisons that support the death penalty.[146] Contemporary horror is drawing on these particular loci of social unease to propose a form of fear that suits the age of digital video streaming. If scopophilia has often been considered intrinsic to the horror genre, it can now take central stage thanks to the abundance of cheap and user-friendly visual recording devices (phone and digital cameras) and virtual interfaces (the Internet) that have affected the way we communicate, exchange information, and perceive our lives. Contemporary horror borrows heavily from the visual possibilities of new media but also constructs its fears around them. It feeds off what has been called 'mediated voyeurism', or the act of consuming 'revealing images of and information about others' apparently real and

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[144] Richard B. Woodward, 'Dare to Be Famous: Self-Exploitation and the Camera', in *Exposed: Voyeurism, Surveillance and the Camera*, ed. by Sandra S. Phillips (London: Tate, 2010), p. 229-39, p. 230.

[145] Lockwood, 'All Stripped Down', pp. 40-48, 45.

[146] Michael McGuire, *Hypercrime: The New Geometry of Harm* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 118-9. This website offer tours of the installations and even factsheets with the breakdown of the costs of lethal injections (p. 118).

unguarded lives, often yet not always for purposes of entertainment but frequently at

the expense of privacy and discourse, through the means of the mass media and the

Internet'.[147] Postmillennial horror draws attention to itself as a medium by presenting

its narratives through different forms of new media. It is invested in an ethics of the

voyeuristic image of mutilation as filtered through the latter. It is also interested in a

negotiation of the guilt inherent in such a process of mediation, something which I

believe has been responsible for its lukewarm critical reception.

Reviews of the film *Untraceable* condemned the self-reflexive element of

postmillennial horror fiercely, understanding it as thoroughly disingenuous. Carla

Meyer explained its apparently intrinsic contradiction:

> Talk about a mixed message. *Untraceable* condemns Internet voyeurism as it
>
> lingers on graphic images of a serial killer's victims being tortured.
>
> Somewhere in the movie is a topical commentary on modern technology
>
> encouraging unhealthy curiosity. But it's buried beneath too much
>
> hypocrisy.[148]

It is this double-standard which, I suggest, makes for an unpleasant, because deeply

involved spectatorial, experience. Unlike the relatively straightforward slashers, which

may be left behind without excessive subjective involvement, postmillennial horror,

particularly horror snuff films, seem to make the spectator complicit in the simple

crime of watching the film.[149] Their capacity to generate viewing responsibility does

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[147] Clay Calvert, *Voyeur Nation: Media, Privacy, and Peering Culture in Modern Culture* (Oxford and Boulder: Westview Press, 2000), pp. 2-3

[148] Carla Meyer, 'A Cursory Drama: "Cyber" Isn't the Only Crime in the Standard Thriller *Untraceable*', *Tribune Business News*, 25 Jan 2008, n.p.

[149] This is not to deny the relevance of the subjective states encouraged by the slasher which, as Carol J. Clover has proved, are deeply connected to notions of gender construction and identity. Rather, I am proposing that the slasher does not necessarily, at heart, challenge the act of consuming slasher films.

not purely address the perennial question 'should we be watching this?', but rather asks 'what does this film say about received and "normalized" spectatorial practices?' If *Peeping Tom* started a questioning of the human and corporate drives behind the consumption of violence, postmillennial horror has placed spectators in an even more challenging position: they are now both judges and victims, torturers and tortured. They have become reluctant mediators of the violence itself. This is evident from the reactions to the films, which signal a reluctance to accept the titillating aspects of the mutilation in them. It would seem that, in the opinion of some, this is an artistic pursuit that brings viewers dangerously close to the material portrayed.

In conclusion, horror in the twenty-first century is very aware of its mediating role in the affective corporeal model I have developed in this thesis. On the one hand, it often uses new forms of media as the narrative elements that determine the end product. The emphasis on new media can be explained as the prefiguring of verisimilitude as a selling point, because if the film can successfully sell itself as 'real' event this adds value to its affective qualities. On the other hand, postmillennial horror acts as an indirect marker of the level of ethical involvement of more corporate understandings of new media. More specifically, films about snuff and faux snuff use new media in a critical way that forces viewers to assess their own position as consumers of mutilation and death. Sobchack explains that such reflexive exercises have an '*ethical charge*: one that calls forth not only response but also responsibility – not only aesthetic valuation but also ethical judgement'.[150] The brutal complicity activated by affective corporeal transgression establishes an even more direct rapport between spectators and mutilation, because the former are forced to consider the implications of that complicity. If nothing else, postmillennial horror illustrates the

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[150] Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts*, p. 284.

current status of mediated violence by purposefully challenging the limits of

spectatorial comfort.

CONCLUSION: Horror, Affect and the Transgressed Body

'The pain outlives the flesh'.[1]

In David Cronenberg's *Scanners* (1980), Dr Ruth (Patrick McGoohan) describes the process of scanning as 'the direct linking of two nervous systems separated by space'. In this thesis I have made a very similar case for the study of bodily horror. I have charted the rise and development of affect as it positions itself in forms of entertainment that appeal directly to the body of the spectator. I have also argued that this process uses the mutilation of external and fictional bodies, whether dramatic/performative or cinematic, to generate a very specific and visceral effect. On an audience, this impact is decidedly unlike the more cognitive, unconscious or symbolic forms of affect explored by psychoanalysis in that it very specifically acts as a bridge between moving images and the nervous system. In fact, I have proposed that the type of corporeal experiences propounded by cinematic subgenres like torture horror or dramatic traditions like that of the grand guignol are closer theoretically to recent critical interventions in Pain Studies concerned with the nature of embodiment. Somatic empathy, encouraged through complex and calculated alignments with the POV of specific characters or close-ups of body parts under surgical attack, creates a direct rapport between spectatorial and dramatic/filmic bodies, forcing an encounter with the BwO. Stripped of everything but its condition as raw life, the mind is forced into apprehending its very carnal and material vulnerability.

I started this thesis by challenging the detrimental rhetoric through which horror has sometimes been studied, but also the need to over-intellectualise the

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[1] Holden (Jesse Williams) in *The Cabin in the Woods* (Drew Goddard, 2012).

genre's intended somatic reactions. It should be obvious from my argument so far that the focus has remained the affective side of horror, and that the genre works at more than one level. Films like *Saw* and *Hostel* are not just corporeally transgressive products that aim to shock the viewer viscerally. As Kevin J. Wetmore has noted, postmillennial horror has been deeply influenced by 9/11 and, to a certain extent, it is possible to read a number of recent films as negotations with that particular terrorist attack.[2] More broadly, much of contemporary horror is invested, like Gothic, in the treatment of various forms of trauma, particularly of a national bent. In Linnie Blake's words, films like *Ringu* 'expose the terrors underlying everyday national life and the ideological agendas that dictate existing formulations of "national cinemas" themselves'.[3] It is therefore important not to see my emphasis on affect as reductive. The main purpose of this thesis has been to legitimise the value of studying affect, particularly as it is expressed in corporeal transgression, and to prove that its material inflection is everything but straightforward. If the study of affecting and being affected cannot and should not be reduced to a series of startle effects, embodied reactions deserve further study, and not only from the humanities. To argue that horror is gratuitous, or that the violence it portrays is more intense than what has come before, is to fail to see how slashers and exploitation films of the 1970s offered similar corporeal formulas to their respective audiences. Instead, I have proposed that we understand the changes in horror as linked to advances in special effects and digital techniques, and as encompassing a social shift that has rendered the inside of the body a site of curiosity and material anxiety. Affect is conveyed through these visceral channels.

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[2] Wetmore, *Post-9/11 Horror in American Cinema*, p. 2.
[3] Linnie Blake, *The Wounds of Nations: Horror Cinema, Historical Trauma and National Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), p. 9.

This is the reason why drama has proven such a productive precursive site of study. The moments in theatre history selected for this thesis show that drama can be a very affective medium and that, within its spectatorial dynamics, a visceral trigger often begets a visceral reaction. From the cathartic efforts of Greek tragedy, where violence is spoken about and pity felt in order to expunge certain feelings from the body, through to the bloody excesses of the British revenge tragedy and the French grand guignol, affect has found itself coded through the destruction of the body. Mutilation and torture, portrayed as realistically as possible, have been used in those dramatic subgenres with the intention to disrupt, shock and create bodily awareness. Although it is crucial to point out here, as I did with horror cinema, that to affect audiences corporeally is by no means everything these dramatic forms achieve, it has been important to trace how they all appeal to a similar sense of somatic empathy. This empathy is not always necessarily dependent on identification with characters, but is instead intimately connected to the recognition of our shared human/carnal bodies. A clip from a late grand guignol piece in the documentary film *This Shocking World*, which I discussed in chapter two, is capable of inciting a physical reaction from viewers when seen in isolation. The fact that theatre-goers are positioned within the same space of the play and in real time has a direct repercussion on the degree of potential affective response. The theatre of cruelty, for example, attempted to exploit this space so as to affect the spectatorial body more immediately, and the Gothic stage's development of an elaborate and grandiose mise-en-scène as well as intricate stage machineries betrays a similar preoccupation. I have read these extreme phases in dramatic history as an early recognition of the affective potential of corporeal transgression. Although not exclusive to drama – the history of painting and

photography is also filled with such visceral techniques – this potential is appropriated and cultivated under different visual and participatory regimes.

The history of the cinematic body is also inextricably linked to the gradual process of the uncovering of mutilation, or what I have referred to as the principle of maximum impact or visibility.[4] Such an affective ethos is necessarily tied down to the capacity of the medium to convey violence realistically, to shock even resilient or experienced viewers, and to appeal to the body directly. The latter is not achieved purely through images, but also sound, the tension generated by a good plot, or in the case of more recent films like *Saw 3D*, three-dimensional technologies. There has been no space in this thesis to assess the limits and possibilities of corporeal transgression in even more sensorially engaging modes like video games or virtually generated realities, but such a study would probably come to a similar conclusion.[5] I have already pointed out that hapticity is increasingly becoming an important trait of contemporary horror and one on which the industry seems eager to invest money and time. *My Bloody Valentine 3D*, *Piranha 3D* (Alexandre Aja, 2010) and *Saw 3D*, do little more than literalise the process of visual attack that corporeal transgression proposes. The 3D scenes in these films generally involve the projection of objects and, increasingly, body parts in the direction of the viewer. Alternatively, they may feature an advancing threat. In all cases, the viewer is invoked as a direct or accidental victim of the violence, and the reaction expected is one of fear and perhaps even instinctive cowering. These methods take spectatorial alignment one step forward in the affective scale, since the spectator is almost ineluctably at the receiving end of the moment of on-screen violence, but their three-dimensional scenarios are not enough in

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[4] Linda Williams's recent *Screening Sex* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), tells a very similar story with regards to the gradual uncovering of the sexual body in Hollywood cinema.
[5] See, for example, Richard Grusin, *Premediation: Affect and Mediality after 9/11* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 97-118.

themselves to predicate somatic empathy. In fact, *Saw 3D* uses 3D techniques almost accessorily; the blood still flows, and the close-ups of mutilated bodies are still the main attraction.

My focus has, for obvious reasons, remained within the most graphic and extreme subgenres of contemporary horror: torture porn, faux snuff and film about snuff. As a result, the most visceral conclusions extracted from the close studies of some prominent examples could potentially appear relevant only to the field of extreme or gore cinema. But such a position would be ignoring the extent to which bodily horror is characterised by its mainstream appeal. By focusing on these instances of popular horror I have contributed to the field of Horror Studies and to Film Studies more generally. In fact, other discoveries made in this thesis are equally applicable to a large number of films that would not necessarily be catalogued under the visceral categories I have explored. Films like *Cloverfield*, an obvious monster feature, or *REC*, a zombie-virus narrative, adopt a hand-held camera aesthetic that actually goes beyond the mere gimmick and drives the plot. The capacity of such techniques to affect the viewer corporeally should not be underestimated: the shaky quality of the images has been known to make some viewers ill. In *Paranormal Activity*, moments of heightened affect are achieved by forcing the camera into direct contact with an object or body. Other films, like *Land of the Dead* (George A. Romero, 2005) or *The Devil's Rejects* (Rob Zombie, 2005) show that, if the body has always remained a crucial element of the horror film, its explosion and defilement are very much part and parcel of the genre in its many contemporary incarnations. Even the ghosts in films like *Ringu*, *The Orphanage/El Orfanato* (Juan Antonio Bayona, 2007), *The Grudge* (Takashi Shimizu, 2004) or *FeardotCom* present themselves in very solid and carnal bodies. This does not mean that all contemporary horror is

driven by affect, or indeed that corporeal transgression is the only strand of cinematic affect accessible today. Instead, I would like to suggest that we are moving towards a point in cinematic history where realistic and detailed mutilation may have become so routine to the genre as to appear redundant or unremarkable. Affective corporeal transgression will remain a central part of the genre for years to come.

Coda: The Assimilation of Bodily Horror

Chapter three concluded with the suggestion that contemporary horror may be exploiting the genre's reflexivity in order to implicate the viewer in its horrific scenarios. Whether explicitly exposing the framework of the film and its investment in voyeurism or making the moment of awareness a less overt one, postmillennial horror draws spectators in by making them intrinsic parts of the cinematic puzzle. The potential uneasy complicity between product and consumer is reinforced and it thus creates a surplus of affect or additional disturbance. This is important to the study of films about snuff like *Snuff-Movie* or *The Last Horror Movie* or torture-horror and even horror more generally. Horror's metacinematic qualities in the 1990s, particularly in the neo-slashers popularised by *Scream*, are now perceived as defining characteristics of the genre.[6] It is important to understand that such developments do not merely establish a series of cinematic landmarks with determined sets of aesthetic and thematic concerns but that they also affect and alter the shape and direction of the larger genre. Thus, if it is possible to suggest that after the rise of the neo-slasher it is difficult to find horror that is not, in some measure, aware of itself, it should also hold true that the bodily horror, torture and reflexivity of the noughties have permeated

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[6] Hutchings, *The Horror Film*, p. 115.

horror more widely. My contention is that the drive towards affective corporeal transgression evinced in torture-horror and snuff films is so significant that it has been assimilated and become a given. In fact, some of the rhetorical and stylistic choices I have documented may be so well-ingrained by 2012 that it might be difficult to single them out or perceive them as isolated instances of corporeal transgression.

Drew Goddard's *The Cabin in the Woods* (2012), the most metacinematic horror film to date, in many ways exemplifies the state of contemporary horror as inflected by the subgenre innovations presented in this thesis. In fact, in its claim to being 'the horror film to end all horror films', it is as much a homage to the genre as it is a fierce critique of its formulaic nature and predictability.[7] Even though the plot and narrative conventions very explicitly situate the film within the slasher tradition, its status as universal horror avatar is emphasised by the high number of intertexual references, which include anything from *Hellraiser* to J-horror, and by its implementation of visual techniques and shocks that do not belong to one exclusive subgenre. The fact that co-screenwriter Joss Whedon has expressed publicly his disregard for the torture-horror phenomenon similarly indicates a particular desire to comment on the possible limitations of the genre, but the film shares little with *Saw* or *Hostel* at a narrative level.[8] It is precisely for this reason that *The Cabin in the Woods* is useful to the conclusion of this study, since it presents itself as a 'state of horror' product, an analysis of what the film sees as constituting that category should be revealing.

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[7] Joss Whedon, quoted in Adam Cook, 'Notebook Reviews: Drew Goddard's *Cabin in the Woods*', *Notebook*, 13 April 2012, <http://mubi.com/notebook/posts/notebook-reviews-drew-goddards-the-cabin-in-the-woods> [accessed May 2012].
[8] More specifically, Wheedon expressed the opinion that torture-horror is 'a cycle of violence and misogyny that takes something away from the people who have to see it'. Quoted in Jill Soloway, 'Remove the Rating for *Captivity*', *The Huffington Post*, 27 March 2007, <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jill-soloway/remove-the-rating-for-cap_b_44404.html> [accessed June 2012].

Goddard's film emphasises its constructed nature early on by disclosing the fact that the spectator is watching a horror film in the making, apparently governed by office workers. Their operations base is presented as an underground complex connected to a vast surveillance system reminiscent of *Big Brother*, something which is also hinted at through the fact that at one point the images go 'live'. CCTV monitors and microphones gather information about the feelings and reactions of the characters within the horror film. This is complemented by the use of a series of conditioning gadgets referred to as 'scenario adjustments'. This entails the imposition of certain spatial constraints, like invisible walls, or the release of mind-altering gasses like 'pheromone mists' to ensure that the youngsters remain within the behavioural patterns most suitable to the various archetypes they embody: the whore, the athlete, the scholar, the fool and the virgin. Called 'targets' by Hadley (Bradley Whitford), one of the two men in charge of this sector, these figures are terrorised and made to act according to what appear to be the traditional, often irrational, patterns of behaviour appropriate to the protagonists of horror films. In fact, *The Cabin in the Woods* makes a point of presenting the nature of the genre not just as formulaic, but even as closed off and finite. In a telling scene, the workers are seen betting on the type of malignant agency likely to be awoken by the characters' actions. Their pool ends up on a blackboard that seemingly contains all the possible permutations of the horrific creature or monster, including 'vampires', 'werewolves', 'doctors', 'sexy witches', and the winner, a 'zombie redneck torture family'. However, the film chooses to depict itself as not entirely scripted. The Director (Sigourney Weaver), who has previously been described as not caring about what happens in the film so long as 'everything goes smoothly', explains towards the end that the virgin – read Carol J.

Clover's 'final girl' – is deliberately left 'to live or die, as fate decides' and that she does not control the outcome of the intradiegetic actions.

Whether free choice is actually an option or merely an illusion is difficult to ascertain. The characters appear able to make their own decisions and should thus perhaps be perceived as 'real' people pushed into accepting an artificially imposed role. This would be reinforced by Marty's (Fran Kranz) remarks that '[they] are not who [they] are' and that 'puppeteers' might be controlling their actions when he notices the personalities of his friends morphing into clichés. The film is also ultimately sabotaged from the inside out, with Jules (Anna Hutchison) and Marty finding their way to the centre of operations and releasing all the abominations stored in the company's glass cabins onto the workers themselves. Since there is no disclosure of fractional memories and the characters do not show cognitive limitations – rather the opposite, for they are able to think themselves out of their imminent deaths – this would seem to signal the presence of 'actual' human beings. But this is severely complicated by the fact that no previous contextual histories are provided (i.e. the characters are not shown as independent from the intradiegetic framework set up by the horror film) and that the Director's threat, '[i]f you live to see [the sun coming up], the world will end', comes true. The characters manage to overturn the fate assigned to them by convention, but this only leads to the sudden end of the film, with a godly hand symbolically lunging towards the viewer in what constitutes an innovative reimagining of the fade to black. The horror film must follow certain guidelines, *The Cabin in the Woods* very firmly suggests, or else it collapses. Whilst there is a speck of truth in this assertion, it is more difficult to assert the exact position viewers should take. It is never clear whether they figure as the equivalent of the ancient gods, unsatisfied with an unconventional horror ending, or whether they are

meant to identify with the characters that have spoken against the norm. The film refuses to be dismissed as a mere experiment that showcases the weaknesses of the genre. Its characters exceed filmic expectations but ultimately fail to survive.

What is the relevance of this film to affective corporeal horror? And why is it important to present it as the epitome of horror's future? First of all, it further complicates the position of horror viewers. Their involvement in the killing of these youngsters, whilst not addressed directly, is invoked by the film. Whether aligned with the ancient gods, whose blood thirst must be appeased through the death of innocent victims, or simply accessory participants who indirectly gain pleasure from the gore, viewers are put into a compromising position where they must face the logics and limitations of the genre. By pulling back and showing the scaffolding that holds the structure of horror together, viewers cannot help at times but challenge, like the characters do, the arbitrary nature of some of its internal rules. In so doing, the film also necessarily shows where the genre stands in 2012. For example, it is clear from *The Cabin in the Woods* that the slasher subgenre has been fully assimilated by now. In fact, the sequential chain of deaths at the hands of some foreign form of threat is presented as the archetypal overarching narrative par excellence. The film also parades previous moments in horror history and how they have now become stock trademarks. From traditional figures like werewolves and zombies, to visual techniques like the startle shock, and even the guest appearance of more specific franchises like *Hellraiser*, the film almost acts as an inventory of the genre. In this respect, it is relevant that a madman performing operations on a live patient or a 'torture family' are now included in this catalogue. Such images are also differentiated from those of other specific and national products like J-Horror, which is very explicitly articulated around the figure of the wraith. In a most telling scene, one of

the office workers explains that 'while those morons [the Japanese] are singing "What a Friend We Have in Shinto", we are bringing in the pain'. This is perhaps the most important line in the film, as it foregrounds the visceral quality that I have emphasised in this work and shows it to be the *sine qua non* of contemporary Western horror.

The allegedly unique form of product discussed by the operators is particularly bloody and centres on the notion of 'pain', as I developed in chapter one. The world of *The Cabin in the Woods* is one where 'zero fatality' is considered a 'total loss' and killing walks hand in hand with torturing. The focus is on the viscerality of the horror and the pain, not the straightforward death of the characters. The film makes a point of this by having an operator symbolically release a stream of blood that fills up sacrificial carvings with the shape of the archetype that has been annihilated. Similarly, the characters are dispatched in bloody moments that do not pull back but rejoice in the gore, and the diary read aloud by Dana fetishises the 'glory of the pain' and the 'cutting of the flesh'. Also, unlike the neo-slashers of the 1990s, there is little comic relief in the intense moments of mutilation, something which is coupled with a carnihilistic and bleak vision of the world that echoes the ideas I explored in chapter one. These characters are governed by material puppeteers that control them in very physical ways. The general message of the film is dubious, as I mentioned, but whether we choose to believe in the ancient gods or see them as an impersonation of the gory drive of horror viewers, there is little consolation to be found in the ending of *The Cabin in the Woods*. Its bleak outlook, influenced by the hopeless landscapes of the torture porn phenomenon, is made explicit when Marty walks out of the house and looks at the night sky. As he puts it, this reality is one where 'there are no stars' and human beings 'have been abandoned'. Goddard's film, whilst not being strictly about torture-horror or snuff films, contains many of the tropes and images that have been

nurtured and developed in the last decade. They are also presented as examples of horror film today, and not as exceptional instances of a recent past.

The Cabin in the Woods is not an isolated case. Most horror film blockbusters of the last decade show some awareness of the visceral and corporeal turn of affect in horror and its various aesthetic, thematic and narrative corollaries. *The Final Destination* franchise (2000-2011) and *The Mist* (Frank Darabont, 2007) both encapsulate the carnihilistic messages of much torture-horror, and the former is also a testament to *Saw*'s agentless formulaic nature. *Scream 4*, aka *Scre4m* (Wes Craven, 2011) cannot help but reference snuff films, particularly as inflected through Internet webcamming reminiscent of the 'real life' deaths of *Snuff-Movie*. This is not to say that bodily horror, in its torture-horror and snuff variants, has influenced the whole of the genre, but rather to suggest that the process is retroactive. I have suggested in previous chapters that horror exploits the Zeitgeist for spectatorial impact, but what needs to be acknowledged is that its viscerality is part of a larger reincorporation, due to current conceptions of the body and advances in visual technology, that has changed the way we produce and consume horror. As *The Cabin in the Woods* shows, mainstream contemporary horror is immediately recognisable. This film comes at a time when, after the censoring of *The Human Centipede* and its limited theatrical release, we could argue torture-horror has abandoned the mainstream and become a cult genre. This does not signal the death of bodily horror, but rather its disappearance as a distinctive subgenre. Affective corporeal transgression has not ended or died off through lack of spectatorial interest. Instead, the exploitation of mutilation prominent in torture-horror or snuff films has been adapted and incorporated into the larger horror tradition. This thesis has demonstrated that to engage with this genre, we must first acknowledge its material reality at a critical and somatic level. The corporeal

affective turn of postmillennial horror signals that it will soon be impossible not to do

so.

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