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Bodily sensation in contemporary extreme horror film

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BODILY SENSATION IN CONTEMPORARY EXTREME HORROR FILM

by

Sarah Downes

A Doctoral Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy of Loughborough University

30 September 2014

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Abstract

Bodily Sensation in Contemporary Extreme Horror Film provides a theory of horror film spectatorship rooted in the physiology of the viewer. In a novel contribution to the field of film studies research, it seeks to integrate contemporary scientific theories of mind with psychological paradigms of film interpretation. Proceeding from a connectionist model of brain function that proposes psychological processes are underpinned by neurology, this thesis contends that whilst conscious engagement with film often appears to be driven by psychosocial conditions – including cultural influence, gender dynamics and social situation – it is physiology and bodily sensation that provide the infrastructure upon which this superstructure rests. Drawing upon the philosophical works of George Lakoff, Mark Johnson and Alain Berthoz, the argument concentrates upon explicating the specific bodily sensations and experiences that contribute to the creation of implicit structures of understanding, or embodied schemata, that we apply to the world round us.

Integrating philosophy with contemporary neurological research in the spheres of cognition and neurocinematics, a number of correspondences are drawn between physiological states and the concomitant psychological states often perceived to arise simultaneously alongside them. The thesis offers detailed analysis of a selection of extreme horror films that, it is contended, conscientiously incorporate the body of the viewer in the process of spectatorship through manipulation of visual, auditory, vestibular, gustatory and nociceptive sensory stimulations, simulations and the embodied schemata that arise from everyday physiological experience. The phenomenological film criticism of Vivian Sobchack and Laura U. Marks is adopted and expanded upon in order to suggest that the *organicity* of the human body guides and structures the psychosocial engagement with, and interpretation of, contemporary extreme horror film. This project thus exposes the body as the architectural foundation upon which conscious interaction with film texts occurs.

Keywords: phenomenology, experientialism, neuroanatomy, neurocinematics, extreme horror film, cognitivist film theory, connectionism, psychoanalysis.

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Introduction – Body-Horror

> 'Our eyes are one of those vulnerable chinks in the armor, one of those places where we can be had […] Like our other facial equipment, eyes are something we all have in common […] But to the best of my knowledge, no horror movie has ever been made about a nose out of control, and while there has never been a film called *The Crawling Ear*, there *was* one called *The Crawling Eye*.'
> Stephen King, *Danse Macabre* (1981)[1]

According to Stephen King – who ought to know – the horror genre holds a special regard for the human eye. Our eyes enable so much of our existence; when they function correctly they lead and guide our progress through the phenomenal world and we understand that they are to be protected. An attack upon the eye generates a primeval kind of terror that threatens the very existence of the victim. Horror begins with the eyes. There is, however, much anecdotal evidence to suggest that bodily engagement with horror cinema does not end with our optical organs. There have been repeated media reports and urban legends detailing the extreme bodily reactions of horror spectators. From the 'fainting, vomiting and heart attacks' provoked by *The Exorcist* (1973) to the 'stomach-quivering, skin-crawling, bathroom-dashing' sickness prompted by *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) with its unstable hand-held aesthetic.[2] This genre can, it seems, promote an uncontrollably visceral reaction. Its effect does not end there, however, as intense ethical and political reactions are also instigated by the extreme content. The rise of home video equipment during the 1980s saw horror titles proliferate, culminating in the demonisation of the 'video nasty' by The National Viewers and Listeners Association (NVLA).[3] Ruggero Deodato's *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980), Wes Craven's *The Last House on the Left* (1972) and Meir Zarchi's *I Spit on Your Grave* (1978), among others, were prosecuted under the Obscene Publications Act (1959) as morally reprehensible productions. Despite the subsequent reclassification of most of the banned films the link between visual fiction and real violence has proven enduring. Parts of the mass media often attribute the motivation for crimes to the viewing or playing of violent films and games. The murder of James Bulger was repeatedly associated with Tom Holland's

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[1] Stephen King, *Danse Macabre* (New York: Gallery, 1981), pp. 202-3.
[2] BBFC, 'The Exorcist: Case Study', *BBFC.co.uk* (n.d.) <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/case-studies/exorcist> [accessed 16 July 2014] (para. 2 of 15); Emily Wax, 'The Dizzy Spell of *The Blair Witch Project*', *Washington Post* (30 July 1999) <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/movies/features/witchdizzy.htm> [accessed 16 July 2014] (para. 1 of 22).
[3] BBFC, 'Video Nasties', *BBFC.co.uk* (2005) <available at: http://www.bbfc.co.uk/education-resources/education-news/video-nasties> [accessed 20 August 2014] (para. 4 of 8).

Child's Play (1988) in which protagonist Chucky 'abducts the youngest [military] cadet and tries to kill him under the wheels of a fairground ghost train'.[4] Similarly, Daniel Gonzalez murdered several people whilst claiming schizophrenic hallucinations were commanding him to behave like Freddy Krueger. The media reported that 'Gonzalez's childish fascination with horror films […] briefly [gave] him the newspaper headlines he craved' thus intimating that violent horror film somehow prompted or motivated the heinous acts.[5] It seems that horror films have a multiple-aspect effect upon their viewers, enacting a triangulation of physiological, affective and intellectual responses. Horror film interacts with the viewer across a spectrum of engagement that incorporates biological, psychological and sociological factors.

This thesis will explore the construction of the viewing experience as a synthesis of physiological and psychosocial determinants. It will be contended that whilst conscious engagement with film often appears to be driven by psychosocial conditions – including cultural influence, gender dynamics and social situation – it is physiology and bodily sensation that provide the infrastructure upon which this superstructure rests. The argument set forth will, therefore, concentrate on highlighting the specific bodily sensations and experiences that contribute to the creation of implicit structures of understanding, or 'embodied schemata', that we apply to the world round us.[6] A number of correspondences will be drawn between physiological states and the concomitant psychological states often perceived to arise

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[4] Paul Bracchi, 'The Police Were Sure James Bulger's Ten-Year-Old Killers Were Simply Wicked. But Should Their Parents Have Been in the Dock?', *Mail Online* (13 March 2010) <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1257614/The-police-sure-James-Bulgers-year-old-killers-simply-wicked-But-parents-dock.html> [accessed 20 August 2014] (para. 55 of 66).

[5] Joe Boyle, 'Craving of Horror Film Murderer', *BBC News* (16 March 2006) <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4802628.stm> [accessed 20 August 2014] (para. 23 of 23).

[6] Mark Johnson, *The Body in The Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 21. The plural pronouns 'us' and 'we' are employed throughout this thesis to indicate the category 'human'. The emphasis of this enquiry is placed upon the material conditions of embodiment – having a body of a specific sort – and it is maintained that, despite differences in gender, race, age, culture, sexuality and physical disability the human body is relatively homogenous at the level of its biophysiology. That is, all human beings have a centralised and cephalised central nervous system; a globally linked peripheral nervous system; a brain with the same basic capacities of function (i.e. all brains operate via neurons that conduct electrical impulses between cells); and, an inner biology that is principally adapted to directional bipedal locomotion (irrespective of the individual's ability to *achieve* bipedal locomotion). The socioculturally influenced *ways in which we conceptualise the body* are not the primary focus of this thesis as it seeks to highlight the *universally shared* conditions of embodiment: every human has the same basic body, at the cellular biological level and it is this embodiment that influences the experiences of bodily sensation discussed in this thesis.

simultaneously alongside them. This is not, it must be underlined, an attempt to reduce psychological or emotive states to physiology but rather the imperative here is to instate physiological influence into the constitution of the psychological phenomenon of film interpretation through the integration of neuroscientific and neurocinematic principles with conventional film theory. It is the intent of this thesis to redress the paradigmatic film spectator – implicitly caricatured in some branches of film theory as a disembodied mind and a pair of eyes – as a distinctly corporeal, unified organism. In order to illustrate the ways in which bodily sensation can be inscribed in contemporary cinema, I will provide detailed analysis of a range of extreme horror films selected, in part, for their own sustained preoccupation with the human body. It will be proposed that extreme body horror, both in terms of its content and formal properties, underscores and enables the embodiment of the spectator more forcefully, and unavoidably, than any other genre.

This approach is predicated upon a critical recognition of the materiality of the human body as it drives and shapes the psychology of the individual and the ways in which they interact with their environment. The danger inherent in such an approach, of course, is that one subscribes to a crude biological determinism which occludes the import of sophisticated psychological processes with a simplified emphasis upon the physical. Needless to say, this thesis will aim at all times to eschew a hierarchical privileging of biology over psychology but its animating principle is that such a hierarchy exists – in reverse – in film theory with the body repeatedly subjugated by a myopic concentration on the mind. This devalorisation ignores the crucial role that the body and sensory experience play in determining the experiences of the individual. The relative inflexibility of the body's macro-form must influence, guide and shape both the type of experience we can have and the ways in which we are subsequently able to interpret those experiences and create coherences from them. In the same way that buildings need material foundations from which they obtain structure and reinforcement, so too does the meaning-making subject require foundations. The architectural basis of the individual is the body and horror film theory must, like Dr. Frankenstein, bring the body back to life.

The remainder of this introductory chapter will explicate the ways in which the existing wealth of horror film scholarship can be augmented – mutated perhaps –

by a broader consideration of the influence of the physiological body upon the operations of the conscious mind. It will begin by surveying the contemporary extreme horror film, its cultural mythology, affects and effects in order to suggest that this subgenre is the pinnacle of inter- and extra-diegetic embodiment. It will subsequently engage with the enduring – and arguably dominant – critical paradigm of psychoanalysis, and suggest that, whilst such critiques are rightly influential, they are missing a conceptual spoke from their foremost wheel. It will be proposed that the very roots of a psychoanalytic approach must be indelibly planted in the material body; and, indeed, that much psychoanalytic engagement with horror is, in fact, uprooted from this basis by an incremental focus upon the psychosocial facets of personhood. It will be suggested that scientific advances in sensory neurology can help to elucidate the ways in which psychology is irrecoverably underpinned by physiology. To this end, the connectionist model of brain function will be explored in order to propose that material experience – including the sensory experiences of the human body – inescapably and intimately generates the conditions for consciousness. Consciousness is, therefore, an emergent property of the organic existence of the human animal. Thus, the objects of consciousness – including the psychoanalytic realms of the Imaginary and Symbolic in which the interpretation of films is alleged to take place – are inscrutably constituted from a collective of sociocultural, psychological *and* physiological factors. Finally, the psychoanalytic and scientific discourses will be synthesised and reintegrated with one another as the physiological foundations of psychosocial theory are excavated. In so doing, an epigenetic framework capable of illuminating the implicit embodied structures of human experience and psychosocial understanding will emerge, primed and able to address the embodied contemporary extreme horror film.

Why Horror?

Horror, one hardly needs mention, has a longstanding fascination with the human body. It is arguably the most *embodied* of cinematic genres both in terms of filmic content and the somatic responses of the spectator. The very name of the genre implies its ultimate aim of generating an intense negative affect that is not principally limited to either the corporeal or the psychological. While the dominant use and

understanding of the word has been and remains *a painful emotion compounded of loathing and fear*, its supplementary, and for the most part historical, meanings incorporate additional concepts. From the 1300s 'horror' denoted roughness or ruggedness and by the 1600s it had become associated specifically with nausea. Such roughness was transmuted into a rippling or ruffling of the surface by the 1700s, while medical definitions from the 1500s associate the term with a shuddering or a shivering more in line with its Latin etymology, *horrēre*, meaning to bristle. Etymologically, thus, horror has tangible links with texture, with taste, bodily functions (nausea, shivering), with the notion of intrusion or disturbance to a surface and with the skin and hair that it causes to bristle.[7]

Critical responses to horror film, however, tend to take the physiological nature of the genre as a given and, as a result, succeed in marginalising the physical in favour of what it represents symbolically. Carol Clover, for example, quite rightly points out that 'horror privileges eyes because, more crucially than any other kind of cinema, it is about eyes. More particularly it is about eyes watching horror'.[8] Clover's reduction presents the viewer of horror as constituted primarily if not exclusively by their eyes. This is perhaps justifiable: sight is our primary sense, after all, and the principal medium of transmission for film. The genre does display a preoccupation with eyes: from the literal attack upon the organ of sight in Umberto Lenzi's *Cannibal Ferox* (1981) and Victor Salva's *Jeepers Creepers* (2001), to the metaphorical attack on vision in *Peeping Tom* (1960) and *The Eye* (2008). Clover's critical focus upon the dynamics of the cinematic look, together with the frequency of close-up shots of terrified eyes, situate vision (and the primacy of that sense) as a site of conflict within horror cinema. While the genre undoubtedly depicts eyes and vision in a metonymical fashion, drawing attention to the mechanisms of the medium and the propagation of the fascinated look that it produces through the mobilisation of that same look, to reduce the horror film viewer to their eyes is to perform a disservice to the sensorial range of the medium and the individual. The eyes are, after all, the sensory organ most intimately tied to the central nervous system of the human organism: 'despite its

[7] This type of embodied response to horror also shares salient features with a popular psychoanalytic theory that often finds application in the genre – Julia Kristeva's *abject*. It is the more bodily, visceral reaction that distinguishes Kristeva's abject from Sigmund Freud's also-often cited uncanny. This bodily dimension of Kristeva's theory, and its significance for this inquiry, will be elaborated on shortly.

[8] Carol Clover, *Men, Women and Chain Saws* (London: BFI, 1992), p. 167.

peripheral position, the retina […] is actually part of the central nervous system' and, by virtue of its proximity, the eyes are often considered to be the fastest of the sensory organs to generate and adapt to perceptions.[9] We do not disengage our eyes and mind from the remainder of our bodies when we watch a film and yet many critical accounts of horror appear to ignore, or only incidentally gesture towards, the totality of the viewer's body.

Linda Badley's study, *Film, Horror and the Body Fantastic* (1995), positions the body as the centrepiece of its critical focus but nevertheless demonstrates the difficulties of addressing the physiological within or alongside the psychosocial process of viewing film. Of 1980s horror, Badley writes that it 'joined with other discourses of the body to provide a language for imagining the self in transformation, re-gendered, ungendered, and regenerated, or even as an absence or a lack'.[10] While Badley seizes upon the fact that horror often explores the human body through its themes and motifs, already we sense the slippage between the organic entity and its sociocultural construction. Horror's joining with other *discourses*, its reimagining of the *self* and the very notion of *transformation* indicate a body that is more conceptual than physiological. Enacting a move from the biological to the sociological, Badley's discourse addresses the way in which the image of the body influences and shapes psychosocial concepts of the (biological) body. Indeed, she goes on to discuss the construction of the body as culturally mediated when she claims that medical and surgical culture leads us to feeling

> trapped in the bodies that increasingly determine who we are, projecting a negative or positive image, defining our neuroses as disorders and our rituals and relationships as addictions and codependencies. As gene therapies bring back the spectre of eugenics, our sense of identity and the human is undermined.[11]

Contemporary consumer culture is saturated with images of bodies – a phantasmagoria of commodities, fashions, celebrities, and plastic surgery – that have

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[9] Dale Purves , G. J. Augustine, D. Fitzpatrick, et al., eds., *Neuroscience*, 2nd edition (Sunderland, MA: Sinauer Associates, 2001), p. 234. This perception, however, is flawed, as the senses of balance and hearing are typically as quick to respond to changes in stimuli as the eyes. Nevertheless, vision retains a heightened significance because of its import to our experience.
[10] Linda Badley, *Film, Horror and the Body Fantastic* (Westport: Greenwood, 1995), p. 3.
[11] Badley, p. 27.

become weapons of ideology. The body is used to sell products (clothes, makeup, personal hygiene), services (laser hair removal, teeth whitening) or an ideal (breast and penis augmentation, Botox injections). The mediated body surrounds us to the extent that there appears to be 'an unlimited display of physicality in mass culture'.[12] Yet it is the body *as a signifier*, the body that is already socially coded, that surrounds us and it is this body that is most frequently the concern of horror film criticism. Paradoxically, however, it is the universality and the corporeal commonality of the physiological body that allows this mode of signification to exist. As Ted Polhemus argues, it is 'because every individual in a society has a physical body and because the education of that body can begin from babyhood (if not before) [that] the body (that is the socialized body) is *the* fundamental and universal guide by which human beings understand that they are social beings'.[13] I would like to extend Polhemus' argument: it is because every individual has a physical body that they are aware that they are beings in the first place, before they realise that their body type is shared and that they are social beings. The fundamental importance of that physical body leaves it vulnerable to mobilisation for a purpose, whether that purpose is selling products or urging citizens to contribute to national defence.

The image of the body is held in place by multiple psychosocial structures of influence and control. When Badley claims that we are trapped in our bodies she is invoking the psychosocial body – the image that controls so much of our wants and needs – and not the physiological body. We are trapped by what we believe our bodies to be (incorporeal non-bodies subject to remanufacture by socioeconomic machinery). The discomfort with this psychosocial body that generates the feeling of being 'trapped' is based upon a fundamental tension between *what we think we are or would like to be* and *what we actually are*. Our concept of 'the human' has for centuries been focused upon sentience, higher order thinking and on the concept that the human being is unlike any other creature on the Earth. Medical advances, cosmetic surgery, celebrity culture, health culture, advertising, even the Internet, perpetuate the idea that the human – that most rational, thinking creature – should be able to transcend its form, to be whatever it wants to be. Increasingly, however,

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[12] Marzena Kubisz, *Strategies of Resistance* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2003), p. 8.
[13] Ted Polhemus, 'Social Bodies', in *The Body as A Medium of Expression*, ed. by Jonathan Benthall and Ted Polhemus (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1975), pp. 13-35 (p. 31).

science and technology show us that this idea is a myth, that artificial augmentation solves none of the perceived problems of human physicality. Even if it were to partially solve them it would inevitably transmute the original 'problem' into a new one, thus propagating the never-ending cycle of desire-acquisition-new desire that structures the Western capitalist economy. Despite understanding the principles of cognition, for example, we are as yet unable to recreate sentience in an artificial intelligence. Despite great advances in medical science the biggest killers are the organic diseases of cancer and AIDs, for which we are yet to discover remedies. Concepts like eugenics haunt the human psyche because they remind us that our body is organic and that we are, fundamentally and to a large extent, shaped by our biology. We are 'trapped' but we need to be trapped. There is a remarkable degree of flexibility within the human body and mind, a flexibility that has been extended by the advances of science and medicine – gender reassignment surgery, for example, reconciles the individual with their 'correct' biological body, and injury and aging redefine the way one conceptualises their own body – but there is only a finite spectrum along which the body can be flexible. The type of biological limitations I am recognising here are the large-scale structural limitations: wings cannot be grafted onto a human body and a bird be produced; gills cannot be implanted into a human because of the extensive alterations to the vascular system that would need to be in place to support the aqueous exchange of oxygen without functioning lungs. We are hominid bodies and without hominid bodies we would not be 'us'. What neuroscience is now leading us to is a vantage point from which we can explore what it means to be constituted and limited by our complex biology and how this can help us understand our own, often contradictory behaviour.

Where horror has often been read as a reflection of social hierarchies and ideologies in contention, I would like to make the argument that the genre has always been principally concerned with the potentials and limitations of human embodiment. Contemporary horror, and particularly the extreme variant that portrays the very limits of physical suffering, is increasingly following neuroscience to its analytical vantage point in order to survey and analyse what it means to be embodied. In particular, the films addressed by this thesis form part of a brand of horror film that exhibits a visceral fascination with the body, embodiment and the limits of our organic existence in terms of both content and form. The films are grouped under the

tentative title of 'contemporary extreme horror' in an attempt to off-set the potentially pejorative connotations of other labels applied to similar films. Of these alternative labels, Hollywood 'torture porn' and Franco-European 'new extremism' have the most cogency for the current inquiry. It is important, therefore, to explicate the similarities and differences between these labels in order to define the subgenre of horror film addressed by this thesis.

James Quandt coined the term 'New French Extremism' in response to a wave of horror film that emerged during the early twenty first century. Grouping films including Gaspar Noé's *Irréversible* (2002) and Alexandre Aja's *Haute Tension* (2003; also known as *Switchblade Romance*) together as paradigmatic examples, he argues that the new extremist aesthetic is characterised by

> a cinema suddenly determined to break every taboo, to wade in rivers of viscera and spumes of sperm, to fill each frame with flesh, nubile or gnarled, and subject it to all manner of penetration, mutilation and defilement.[14]

Drawing together the moral implications of the taboo, the pornographic connotations of sperm, nubile flesh and penetration, with what is implicated to be an excess of bodily violence, Quandt's label bears a remarkable resemblance to David Edelstein's coinage of 'torture porn'. Devised two years following Quandt's assessment of French cinema, Edelstein's moniker was applied to a batch of Hollywood films whose narrative centred upon 'explicit scenes of torture and mutilation'.[15] Listing *Saw* (2004), *Hostel* (2005), and *The Devil's Rejects* (2005) amongst his examples, Edelstein focused upon what he views as the inherent sadism in viewing scenes of explicit violence. Whilst both classifications exhibit a preternatural fascination with graphic violence and both intimate the relationship between horror and pornography, subsequent development of the terms has led to a disparity in their application. For

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[14] James Quandt, 'Flesh and Blood: Sex and Violence in Recent French Cinema', in *The New Extremism in Cinema: From France to Europe*, ed., by Tanya Horeck and Tina Kendall (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), pp. 18-26 (p. 19). Written in 2004, Quandt's article predates Pascal Laugier's *Martyrs* (2008). In an Afterword written in 2011, however, Quandt includes Laugier's film in his New French Extremism classification.

[15] David Edelstein, 'Now Playing at Your Local Multiplex: Torture Porn', *New York Movies*, (n.d.) <http://nymag.com/movies/features/15622/>, para. 2 of 12 [accessed 18 September 2014].

example, Tim Palmer argues that the New Extremism challenges cinema to be a medium that can 'generate profound often challenging sensory experiences' whilst Christopher Sharrett proposes that torture porn demonstrates 'intellectual bankruptcy' and that 'an attempt to evaluate these films seriously provokes doubt about such a project's worth'.[16] Differentiated by the excesses of Hollywood style, the two strains of extreme film may be viewed as being in contention with one another. As Palmer's extremism encompasses the artistry of filmmaking alongside violence, Sharrett's focuses upon the bravura celebration of violence induced by Hollywood's exhibitionist titles. I would argue, however, that the difference between the two strains is more a matter of viewpoint than of fundamentally opposing aesthetics. The spectacular violence of so-called torture porn films can, in some instances, work *with* the 'challenging sensory experiences' provided by contemporary cinematic technologies in the generation of an embodied viewing experience that integrates the viewer's sensorium with the extremity of violence onscreen. There is an area of overlap between the simultaneously arising movements that combines the Hollywood predilection for special effects with the extremist fascination with the manipulation of the viewing experience. It is within this intersection that the films analysed herein can be found.

This thesis will focus upon how a film interacts with its viewer and to this end, new extremism is perhaps a more beneficial term to appropriate in relation to the body of films discussed; yet it is not quite specific enough. It is not only *extremity* that characterises these films, but a confluence of extremity, the sensorial experiences of spectatorship, and the embodied knowledge of the viewer. In the introduction to *The New Extremism in Cinema*, Tanya Horeck and Tina Kendall extend and refine Quandt's Franco-centric classification to a selection of European films that are united not only by their content and form but also by their effect upon the viewer. Horeck and Kendall propose that

[16] Tim Palmer, 'Style and Sensation in the Contemporary French Cinema of the Body', *Journal of Film and Video, 58* (2006), 22-32 p. 22; Christopher Sharrett, 'The Problem of *Saw*: "Torture Porn" and the Conservatism of Contemporary Horror Films', *Cineaste*, 35 (2009), 32-39 (p. 32).

> beyond the collective emphasis in these films on explicit and brutal sex, and on graphic or sadistic violence […] it is first and foremost the uncompromising and highly self-reflexive appeal to the spectator that marks out the specificity of these films.[17]

It is upon this 'appeal to the spectator' that my classification of contemporary extreme film rests. Like new extremism, the films selected display a disturbing fascination with violence against the human body. More specifically than either of the alternative classifications, however, the titles discussed in the following chapters exhibit a preference for the manipulation of sensory experiences, directly through stimulations (Palmer's 'challenging sensory experiences') and indirectly through the invocation of embodied structures of understanding. As such, it is the viewing experience that differentiates these films from other subgenres of horror film. The notions of spectacle, extremity, sociocultural taboo and even spectatorship itself are routinely problematized within narratives that, as Palmer points out, 'engross, bewilder [and] shock' the viewer.[18] My classification is distinguished from torture porn by the rebuttal of spectacle that will be constructed throughout this thesis, and from new extremism by its inherent focus upon corporeality on and *off* screen. It will be argued that it is not simply 'an array of devices' and 'brutal and visceral images' that can be found in these films, but the viewer's corporeal body itself integrated as a critical cog in the production of the viewing experience.[19] It is the commingling of viewer and film performed by these titles that typifies them and, crucially, creates an important communicative bridge between neurophysiology and psychology as the twin pillars of my methodological framework.

The conjoining of neuroscience and horror film may seem unlikely, at first glance, but a consideration of horror tropes is surprisingly revealing: the scientist – mad, righteous or otherwise – has, since Dr. Frankenstein, been a staple of both the Gothic and horror genres. From David Cronenberg's *The Fly* (1986) to Tom Six's *The Human Centipede* (2009) the horror scientist typically alters bodies. Indeed, the concerns of biology generally – the pursuit of knowledge about the organic world and

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[17] Tanya Horeck and Tina Kendall, 'Introduction', in *The New Extremism in Cinema: From France to Europe*, ed., by Tanya Horeck and Tina Kendall (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), pp. 1-17, p. 1-2.
[18] Palmer, p. 28.
[19] Palmer, p. 28; Horeck and Kendall, p. 1.

everything within (including human bodies) – partially mirrors one of the concerns of horror – the pursuit of anxieties pertaining to the organic nature of the human body. Of course, the search for new material, which keeps horror in step with sociocultural and scientific developments, is generated by the need – both economic and social – for the genre to remain 'current'. As a result, horror film today is returning to a focus upon its affective origins: its intent to make the viewer 'feel'. Crucially for the sub-category of horror film upon which this thesis is focused, the bodily sensation elicited does not solely rely upon psychological structures of empathic engagement and identification but is delivered immediately to the viewer through their bodies. This is not affect via empathy, but affect through direct sensory stimulation. It is necessary, however, to acknowledge that this corporeal element of spectatorship exists within the context of a multifarious film experience that combines the physiological spectator with the psychosocial conditions of viewing. Both viewer and film have a dual existence: they exist physiologically and psychologically. The heart of the arguments presented here lies in the recognition of a direct relationship between the physiological and psychological modes of subsistence. In order to explicate and concretise the bridges between the two it is necessary now to review the significant psychological influences upon horror film spectatorship that have already been theorised. The following section will thus provide an overview of an influential psychosocial model of horror film criticism – psychoanalysis – as a precursor to uncovering the essential points of contact between the physiological and psychological acts of viewing. Through analysis of the foundations of the psychoanalytic approach it will be proposed that while the emphasis of the paradigm may be upon the human mind, the 'mind' is not an extant entity but rather finds its own basis in the physiology of the human body.

Psychoanalysis and Horror

> The genre itself invokes psychoanalytic considerations, at times borrowing its imagery from the symbolic apparatus of dream interpretation
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> Andrew Tudor, 'Why Horror? The Peculiar Pleasures of a Popular Genre' (1997)[20]

[20] Andrew Tudor, 'Why Horror? Peculiar Pleasures of a Popular Genre', *Cultural Studies*, 11(1997), 443-463 (p. 446).

Andrew Tudor's polemical assessment of the horror genre is undoubtedly accurate: it does indeed offer itself to psychoanalysis as something of a sacrificial lamb. Its very subject matter – death, doppelgangers, murder, incest, violence, the annihilation of social taboos, the subverting of social order and the refusal of norms – and its unerring focus on what it means to be a living (or dead) human often appear to speak directly to the psychoanalytical paradigm deployed within film theory. During the 1970s, Christian Metz proposed a highly influential Lacanian-Freudian framework for applying the clinical psychiatric practice of psychoanalysis to the examination of cinema. Metz's semiological model built its foundation on three theses: firstly, it constructs 'cinematic fiction as semi-dreamlike'; secondly, it advances 'the spectator screen relationship as a mirror identification'; and finally, it proposes that there is a code to 'the cinematic dream' that can be accessed and analysed through psychoanalytic methods.[21] The potential discord between what is a clinical framework for the treatment of neuroses developed through, for example, Sigmund Freud's interpretation of dreams and Jacques Lacan's identification-forming mirror stage, is reconciled in Metz's work by the equivalence he finds between the human psyche and the way an individual interacts with the world – including their reactions to art, literature, fiction and film. In a drastically simplified form, the critical viewpoint assumes that traces of the structure of the human psyche can be discovered within the artefacts that the psyche can produce. For Metz, 'certain phenomena that psychoanalysis has illuminated or can illuminate occur in the cinema' – particularly the pursuit of the 'good-object relation', or filmic pleasure.[22] The cinematic 'institution as a whole has filmic pleasure alone as its aim', not least because pleasurable viewing experiences stimulate repeat custom thus driving the cinematic industry.[23] In Metz's view, not only is the structure of the human psyche intrinsic to how we access and interact with film, but the industry itself (in its desire to generate pleasurable viewing experiences) models itself upon the composite parts and drives of that psyche.

[21] Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), p. 6.
[22] Metz, p. 22.
[23] Metz, p. 7.

> The outer machine (the cinema as industry) and the inner machine (the spectator's psychology) are not just metaphorically related, the latter a facsimile of the former, 'internalising' it as a reversed mould, a receptive hollow of identical form, but also metonymically related as complementary segments: 'wanting to go to the cinema' is a kind of reflection shaped by the film industry, but it is also a real link in the chain of the overall mechanism of that industry.[24]

Metz's semiology thus canonised psychoanalysis as the emerging dominant paradigm of cinematic theory in a way that highlighted not only the important psychological relations between spectator and film, and spectator and the cinema apparatus, but also the economic function of the cinema *industry* and the role that it plays in the generation and maintenance of a particular type of audience. Crucial to this is the notion of situating the spectator in relation to the events onscreen, such that the screen acts as the 'mirror' of Jacques Lacan's mirror stage.

> In the mirror the child perceives the familiar household objects, and also its object par excellence, its mother […] But above all it perceives its own image. This is where primary identification (the formation of the ego) gets certain of its main characteristics: the child sees itself as an other, and beside an other. This other other is its guarantee that the first is really it: by her authority, her sanction, in the register of the symbolic.[25]

During the mirror stage the child recognises himself as both subject (me) and object (not me) in the reflection, his status as subject being confirmed by the mother who stands with him. He 'assumes an image', appropriates his reflection as the 'Ideal-I' and the formation of the ego begins.[26] As a result of this primary identification, the Lacanian realms of the Imaginary (the Ideal-I, objects) and the Symbolic (typified by language) precipitate from the realm of the Real (pre-symbolic experience that cannot be articulated) and the child is able to objectify the world, to recognise the world of objects (including itself). Lacan's mirror stage is a distinctly psychological process that hinges upon the individual's classification of him or herself as either subject or object. This type of abstract reasoning originates in the Lacanian Real, in the individual's sense of itself, but is projected into the Imaginary and the Symbolic –

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[24] Metz, p. 8.
[25] Metz, p. 45.
[26] Jacques Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the *I* as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience', in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, Volume 1, ed. by John Storey (Harlow: Pearson, 2006), pp. 287-292 (p. 288).

immaterial realms of cognitive comprehension. The individual that passes through the mirror stage is one capable of detaching him or herself (as Ego, self or Ideal-I) from their physiological body in an act of conceptual understanding.

Like the Lacanian mirror, the cinema displays objects that are recognised as reflections or projections of the objects that they represent but, unlike the Lacanian mirror, it does not show the subject.

> Thus film is like the mirror. But it differs from the primordial mirror in one essential point: although, as in the latter, everything may come to be projected, there is one thing and one thing only that is never reflected in it: the spectator's own body.[27]

Metz's cinematic theory presupposes a spectator who has passed through the mirror stage, successfully entered the symbolic realm and who can thus recognise on the cinema screen a similar representation of objects in the realm of the Imaginary to the reflection of the mirror that presided over the primary identification. The viewer is thus divided, like the original subject of the mirror stage, as both a material existent object and a conceptual 'viewer'. The very mechanics of cinema (its projection of images that are quintessentially 'unreal'), for Metz, align it with the Imaginary – a realm of reflections that metonymically points beyond itself to the concepts that it represents – and the Symbolic concepts that the Imaginary comes to communicate. In doing so, however, Metz's viewer does not consist of the body that reacts to the light and sound emitted from the cinema screen, but the consciousness that interacts with the contents of the film. This foundation has enabled the psychoanalytic paradigm to explore cinema in terms of both form and content but has, nevertheless, focused critical attention upon the psychosocial act and conditions of viewing. The viewer's body, their organic reality, and means of accessing the film have been implicitly abandoned in the auditorium.

Laura Mulvey's often-cited theory of spectatorship, detailed in her influential essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975), addresses the ways in which cinema 'as an advanced representation system […] poses questions about the ways in which the unconscious (formed by the dominant order) structures ways of seeing and

[27] Metz, p. 45.

pleasure in looking'.[28] Like Metz, Mulvey draws upon the Freudian concept of the pleasure principle, in association with the scopic drive, to elucidate a pleasure in looking that articulates the ambivalence of the Lacanian mirror-stage. The dual recognition of one's own reflection as both subject and object generates a dichotomy that spurs the child into engaging with the Imaginary. This dynamism of the 'look' leads to a revelation: 'I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides'.[29] Alongside the disassociation of the reflected image from the material body, the child realises that the look itself is also disassociated. As he looks, he is also looked upon, prefigured by the paradoxical situation of the reflection; he looks at himself looking at himself. The look becomes the gaze, disassociated from the gazer, even from the eye. The disjoint between 'the eye and the gaze [is] for us the split in which the drive is manifested at the level of the scopic field': the dematerialisation of the gaze, according to Lacan, is a replication of the split between the subject and his ego caused by the mirror stage.[30] The gaze denotes both looking-at and *to-be-looked-at-ness* and it is this latter signification that Mulvey attributes to the representation of women in cinema. Mulvey's essay takes the gaze of the cinematic apparatus and explores, through the dual notions of the scopophilic drive and narcissistic identification with the image, the way in which that gaze reproduces the image of woman as a patriarchal signifier as it 'satisfies a primordial wish for pleasurable looking, but it also goes further, developing scopophilia in its narcissistic aspect'.[31]

Although subsequently updated in 'Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema'' (1981) and *Death 24x A Second* (2006), Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure' essay has influenced horror critics both explicitly (including Carol Clover whose work and relationship to Mulvey's theory will be explored shortly) and implicitly as a framework through which to explore the attraction to horror. Of her initial framework Mulvey writes that it,

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[28] Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema', in *Visual and Other Pleasure*, 2nd edn (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009 [1989]), pp. 14-27 (p. 15).
[29] Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. by David Macey (London: Penguin, 1994), p. 72.
[30] Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, p. 78.
[31] Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure', p. 17.

> intends to use psychoanalysis to discover where and how the fascination of film is reinforced by pre-existing patterns of fascination already at work within the individual subject and the social formations that have moulded him. It takes as its starting point the way film reflects, reveals and even plays on the straight, socially established interpretation of sexual difference which controls images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle.[32]

Mulvey takes as her point of origin the fact that the cinematic apparatus is man-made and culturally defined (as indeed, are the films it shows) and posits that the mechanics of cinema itself reflect and reinforce the social hierarchies at work in the wider society. What the 'Visual Pleasure' thesis suggests therefore is that the cinematic apparatus acts as a mechanism for reinforcing the key structural relationship between the male order and the female symbolic. In doing so, however, the relationship between the physiological aspects of the viewer – their body, their sensory modalities, and their brain – and the film, as a confluence of both symbolic meaning *and* sensory experience, is subtly elided. The 'real' aspects of viewership (the physiological experience) depreciate as the 'symbolic' aspects of viewership (interpretation, the deciphering of meaning) are pushed to the fore.

In his seminal contribution to this field, 'An Introduction to the American Horror Film' (1979), Robin Wood uses a Freudian-Marxist framework to propose that the genre is grounded in a horrified fascination with monsters which embody all that is oppressed within society and repressed within the self. Applying what Metz might recognise as an assessment of characterology, Wood uses the concept of repression to interpret a range of horror film tropes as symptomatic of the regulation and creation of 'monogamous, heterosexual, bourgeois, patriarchal capitalists'.[33] Like Mulvey's model, Wood constructs cinema as a reflection and refraction of society. Using this prototype, 'non-hegemonic' sexual energy – bisexuality, female sexuality and child sexuality – is considered to be essential material for repression in order to maintain a social order that fosters the desirable norms of heterosexual patriarchal power and above all, the desire to conform. Thus Wood describes two psychoanalytic theses in relation to this process: 'that in a society built on monogamy and family there will be an enormous surplus of sexual energy that will have to be repressed […] what is

[32] Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure', p. 14.
[33] Robin Wood, 'An Introduction to the American Horror Film', in *Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film*, ed., by Barry Keith Grant (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 1996), pp. 164-200 (p. 165).

repressed must always strive to return'.[34] The connotations of 'family' for conservative America in the 1970s were largely those associated with a vision of society that allows the (male) norms to control the perceived dangers of female and child sexuality with the stipulation of monogamy and patriarchal dominance. Repression is thus geared towards the eradication of non-conformist non-male desires and impulses so that masculine heterosexual normativity may harmoniously reign. The implication of this reading is that in most conventional Western societies there is a suppression of the needs of the (non-male) individual by the needs of (male) civilisation.[35]

The ideological imperative of these films, according to the psychoanalytic model, is to allow the expression of anxieties that ultimately leads to 'rejecting and if possible annihilating [them] or […] rendering [them] safe and assimilating [them]'.[36] Closure, however, is not always possible, and indeed for a significant subgenre of horror film is virtually impossible to achieve. Wood's own review of horror films can be widely supplemented by more recent antecedents. The critique of female sexuality in *Island of Lost Souls* (1932), *Cat People* (1942) and *Sisters* (1973) can now be joined by Mitchell Lichtenstein's darkly satirical *Teeth* (2007). The concerns of the proletariat Wood found in *Frankenstein* (1931), *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974) and *Race with the Devil* (1975) are complemented by Rob Zombie's *House of 1,000 Corpses* (2003). Anxieties relating to other cultures depicted in *Island of Lost Souls* and *The Manitou* (1978) find analogies in *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980), *The Descent* (2005) and Eli Roth's *The Green Inferno* (2013). The explorations of homo- and bi-sexuality in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975) and *Demon* (1976) are reiterated in Alexandra Aja's *Switchblade Romance* (2003) and Bradley Rust Gray's *Jack and Diane* (2012). The monstrous children of *The Omen* (1976) and *The Exorcist* (1973) are supplemented by the child protagonists of *One Missed Call* (2008) and *Insidious* (2010). Some monsters, it seems, just keep coming back. A

[34] Wood, p. 177.
[35] Civilisation is here considered not as a phenomenal object but a dynamic web of interactions between a group of socially motivated animals (human beings). It thus does not directly infer society in its physical or political forms but implies both in its striving to continue the productive social relations that are so often based upon the rules of conformity and mutual social assistance. It is a civilisation that includes the needs and desires of the individual body in association with the demands of a social structure.
[36] Wood, p. 168.

psychoanalytic account of the function of these horror films has traditionally returned to notions of identification and spectatorship in order to account for their function and attraction.

These critical ways of analysing the social act of seeing have proved incredibly influential. Mulvey's model of spectatorship underpinned a decade of screen theory and Wood's combination of Freudian and Marxist approaches continues to structure insightful analysis of contemporary horror titles. The intricacies of the theories have also instigated critical debate that has developed and advanced the original models. Carol Clover, for example, problematizes Mulvey's construction of spectatorship as guided by the male gaze with her own formulation of a more dynamic cinematic look. Clover's *Men, Women and Chain Saws* (1992) opens a critical dialogue with Mulvey's work focusing upon gender hierarchies in the horror film. Whereas Mulvey takes the primary identification with the camera as inherently gendered male and therefore assigned to the male protagonist of film, Clover argues that horror in particular 'is far more victim-identified than the standard view would have it'.[37] Indeed, the cultural categories of male and female are themselves given flexibility in Clover's model as 'gender [becomes] less a wall than a permeable membrane'.[38] Clover argues that rather than simply recreating the dynamics of male dominance through the apparatus, the horror genre problematizes the notion of fixed gender-positions. The killer in slasher films, Clover argues, is rarely completely masculinised, floundering as (s)he does to complete the mission and eventually being overcome (at least temporarily) by the Final Girl. The Final Girl of slasher films – Laurie Strode from *Halloween* (1980), Sidney Prescott in *Scream* (1996), and Dana Polk from *The Cabin in the Woods* (2012) et al. – is the victim that gets away, the sole survivor. Frequently semi-masculinised by her name, a characterisation that usually involves a refusal of promiscuous female sexuality and ultimately by her assertive and successful action against the monster, the Final Girl seems to navigate or even combine gender roles. The Final Girl is female but her symbolic function is to ''read' some aspect of male experience': it is the relationship between the positions she traverses that is significant, not the positions in and of themselves.[39] Clover's

[37] Clover, pp. 8-9.
[38] Clover, p. 46.
[39] Clover, p. 53.

framework questions what happens if or when a masculinised primary identification collides with an empathic victim-focused secondary identification: is the gaze controlling or is the control subverted by the reflexivity of the victim-role? In either case, the preoccupation with identification, the social construction of gender and the relentless return of the repressed (is it a coincidence that the slasher monster is characterised as *always* returning?) focus both Clover and Mulvey's engagement on the level of the psychosocial. Despite Mulvey, Wood and Clover's models addressing the ways in which horror film affect and influence their viewers, the frameworks offered do little to address the *materiality* of those viewers. Spectators are constructed as psychological beings constituted by complex psychosocial influences that interact with 'the film', where the film is considered to be a pre-constituted 'whole' that exists as a concept, rather than a phenomenal object. Lacan's recognition of the realm of the Real, however, indicates that his psychology (and indeed, the psychologised subject) has corporeal origins, and it is the intent of this thesis to reconnect psychosocial readings of film with the physiological foundations of understanding.

Implicit in psychoanalytic models of film criticism is the relationship between the individual viewer and the psychosocial environment in which they exist. This emphasis can be traced – superficially at least – to the dematerialising aspects of the Lacanian mirror stage. The promotion of the ego as a type of 'disassociation' of the subject (consciousness, and its concomitant unconsciousness) from their object-body is a process that projects the subject into the dialectical realms of the Imaginary and the Symbolic. Both the Imaginary and the Symbolic are psychosocially constructed spaces of abstract thought – the registers through which the subject can conceptualise himself and his place in the order of the world. The construction of the cinema as an industry of the Symbolic, proposed by Christian Metz and implicitly reiterated in the persistence of an engagement with the 'unreality' or the 'deceptive' nature of cinema, necessarily situates the film viewing experience in the consciousness of the individual – in their mind, but not in their body. The psychoanalytical paradigm appears to be a dematerialising one. Yet the claim for the dematerialising force of *psychoanalysis* seems somewhat counter-intuitive. Lacan's psychoanalytic framework was born from the clinical need to address and treat psychophysiological disorders, irrecoverably rooted in the material existence of the patient. Psychoanalysis is a science of

behaviour that has been adapted and partially transmuted to 'fit' the frame of literary and filmic interpretation.

Slavoj Žižek's more recent psychoanalytic analyses of the cinema have suggested that the canonical 'Lacanians' are better considered to 'engage with' Lacan, rather than draw upon his work directly. 'They appropriate some Lacanian concepts as the best descriptions of the universe of patriarchal domination', yet the readings that they produce seem curiously disassociated from the body of the spectator around which they are written.[40] The very qualities of the emphasis upon *fiction* – the fiction of the narrative and the 'fiction' of the medium – have led theory towards the incidental (rather than systematic) disregard of Lacan's realm of the Real. Film is, after all, essentially un-real. Lacan's Symbolic and Imaginary, however, find their origins in the Real in the first instance: in the pre-symbolic, pre-mirror stage state, the child is engulfed in the Real – the inarticulate experience of *being*. Once the child enters into the Imaginary in the recognition of his reflection as his Ideal-I, and then into the Symbolic in his ability to conceptualise and communicate through the Imaginary, does the Real cease to be a crucial realm of experience? Because we are unable to articulate, in the Symbolic, the experience of the Real does this mitigate its influence upon the developmental stages of life?

> The paradox is that this symbolic pact, this structural network of relations, can establish itself only in so far as it is embodied in a totally contingent material element, a little-bit-of-Real which, by its sudden irruption disrupts the homeostatic indifference of relations between subjects. In other words, the imaginary balance changes into a symbolically structured network through a shock of the Real.[41]

Although Žižek applies this principle to the narrative content of film, I propose that the viewing of films involves the Lacanian Real as much as the Symbolic or Imaginary – not necessarily in a causal manner, but certainly in a developmental one. The Real, the *something* that pre-exists the formation of the ego, is constituted in part by the physiological reality of the individual's existence, the material facts that enable its being. Whilst I wish to recognise the strong influence of sociocultural factors upon

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[40] Slavoj Žižek, *The Fright of Real Tears* (London: BFI, 2001), p. 2.
[41] Slavoj Žižek, 'Introduction', in *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Lacan: But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock*, ed. by Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso, 1996), pp. 1-14 (p. 5).

the relationship between a film and its viewer (and thus the validity of the psychoanalytic approach as a method of delineating the psychosocial aspects of film viewership) I would also argue that this type of reading requires a conceptual foundation. Psychoanalysis may contend that this foundation is the human mind, but the mind is not itself an extant entity. One cannot remove and capture the mind extrinsic to the body. There are, as Don Tucker states, 'no faculties of memory, conscious perception, or music appreciation that float in the mental ether'; no organism has yet been encountered that can generate the conditions of consciousness without the conditions of a highly specified type of brain.[42] The foundation of the psychoanalytic approach is the human mind, and neuroscience proposes that the mind is an emergent property of the brain. A cogent psychological investigation must, therefore, pay heed to the influence that the brain and the central and peripheral nervous systems have upon the development of the mental domain. Such an inquiry would seek not to undermine the wealth of psychoanalytic literature but to underpin it. Concomitantly, the directions already explored in psychoanalytic film theory – primary and secondary identification, the isolation of specific monster types and functions, an assumption of pleasure in viewing – can act as signposts, directing the inquiry to places where the physical may reinforce the psychological. If psychoanalysis is an exploration of the mind 'from 'within', from the first person perspective of what it feels like to be a mind, a living experiencing subject', then this inquiry can only benefit from an exploration of the mind that maps the connections between the mind, the brain and the body.[43]

The Architecture of Mind

In order to view 'the mind' from the exterior, we must first contextualise what is meant by the term. The mind is an abstract space in which certain cognitive processes take place. It encompasses our thoughts, our emotions, and the way we view the world. It is linked conceptually and literally to the brain and altering or injuring the brain results in alterations to the function of the mind. Insofar as the mind

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[42] Don M. Tucker, *Mind from Body: Experience from Neural Structure* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 59.
[43] Joseph Dodds, 'The Monstrous Brain: A Neuropsychoanalytic Aesthetics of Horror', *PsyArt*, (December 15 2009) <http://www.psyartjournal.com/article/show/dodds-the_monstrous_brain_a_neuropsychoanalyti> [accessed 29 May 2014], Part 1 (para. 5 of 8).

can be considered as a mental space in which in the individual 'thinks', it encompasses a wide array of specific neurological phenomena including emotions, decision-making, and motivational responses. George P. Prigatano elucidates the connection between physical brain damage and the alteration of the 'emotional and motivational characteristics of a person'.[44] Brain damage can lead to transient or permanent changes to 'the control or expression of an affective response' and, 'in regions subserving complex visuospatial perceptions, language processing, and higher order or 'executive' functions [it] can affect […] cognitive processes'.[45]

The precise nature of the link between the brain and the mind is an enduring topic of exploration for both psychology and neuroscience, and one that is yet to receive any kind of definitive answer. Despite this ambiguity, there is a tangible connection between the functioning of the brain and that of the mind and it is this that I will now explore. Drawing upon a connectionist model of brain-mind function, I wish to highlight the ways in which the neurophysiology of the brain impacts and shapes the psychological structures of the mind. The brain is, in its most basic form, an integration hub – a superstructure for the collation of sensorimotor information gathered from the external and internal environment that allows the individual to move, manipulate itself and objects, and survive in the phenomenal world. The brain is the central hub of the human nervous system, an intricate web of sensory fibres that are distributed throughout the human body. As such, the brain is the conduit between bodily sensation and the psychological cognition that takes place in the mind. The mind is structured by the brain, which in turn is constituted by the sensory capacities of the organic body. That is not to say that the mind is reducible to its organic components but it is fundamentally underpinned and structured by the human nervous system, sensory organs and brain. This viewpoint is based upon a theory of cortical

[44] George P. Prigatano, 'Personality Disturbances Associated with Traumatic Brain Injury', *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 60 (1992), 360-68 (p. 360).
[45] Prigatano, p. 360.

organisation proposed in the 1970s that formulated the parallel distributed processing (PDP) model of brain function.[46]

The work of Vernon B. Mountcastle and Gerald M. Edelman was brought together through the Neuroscience Research Program in 1977. Mountcastle proposed that human brain function was organised into a modular distributed network.

> The general idea is as follows. The large entities of the brain we know as areas (or nuclei) of the neocortex, the limbic lobe, basal ganglia, dorsal thalamus, and so forth, are themselves composed of replicated *local neural circuits*, modules which vary in cell number, intrinsic connections, and processing mode from one large entity to another but are basically similar within any given entity […] Each module is a local neural circuit that processes information from its input to its output and in that processing imposes transforms [sic] determined by the general properties of the entity and its extrinsic connections. Modules are grouped into entities such as nuclei and cortical areas by a common or dominating extrinsic connection, by the need to replicate a function over a topographic representation or by some other factor […] Closely linked and multiply interconnected subsets of modules in different and often widely separated entities thus form precisely connected but distributed systems.[47]

The human brain and spinal cord constitute the central nervous system (CNS). The brain itself is comprised of billions of neurons that transmit information, via the spinal cord, to and from a global web of nerve fibres that comprise the peripheral nervous system (PNS). The fibres of the PNS carry information from target cells to the CNS and onto the brain and then transmit information from the CNS that causes the human body to act and react to the environment around them. Prior to the work of Mountcastle and other neuroscientists the brain was presumed to process this slew of information serially but these serial models could not account for the speed and

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[46] It should be noted that a scientific 'theory' is not necessarily the same as a philosophical or conceptual 'theory'. The term theory, as applied to science, indicates that something is an explanation of how or why something occurs. As such, scientific theory is the net result of the amalgamation of several years of study across interrelated domains, *not* a hypothetical postulation based on anecdotal evidence alone. Both gravity and evolution remain scientific theories. The PDP model is thus based upon the experimental data of hundreds of individual studies that have isolated and demonstrated the local and global neural connections of the brain. The 'theoretical' aspect of the model lies in the scaling of this evidence to account for theories of 'mind' and the very tangible connection between brain architecture and cognitive ability.

[47] Vernon B. Mountcastle, 'An Organizing Principle of Cerebral Function: The Unit Module and The Distributed System', in *The Mindful Brain: Cortical Organization and the Group-Selective Theory of Higher Brain Function*, ed. by Gerald M. Edelman and Vernon B. Mountcastle (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1978), pp. 7-50 (p. 8).

complexity of human information processing skills. Moreover, serial models of artificial intelligence could not perform complex distinguishing or learning tasks. This indicated that the human brain does not process information in this way. Mountcastle's theory states that the neurons in the brain are clustered into local neural circuits that respond to certain stimuli. These local circuits are then interconnected to neighbouring circuits that process similar, but not identical stimuli.

In each brain area then, hundreds of local circuits go about processing the pieces of information they are specialised for but the connections between them allow that information to be filtered, matched, cross-checked or ordered to create coherence between the fragments of information sensed by individual local circuits. In addition to interconnections within the areas, Mountcastle further proposes that each brain area has numerous connections to other areas that allow for further communication across the entire cortex. The brain is thus a highly diverse, incredibly interconnected web of neural circuits that processes information in parallel – in technical terminology, a parallel distributed processing (PDP) system.[48]

Gerald Edelman's work focused upon the higher brain functions and was based upon a similarly interconnected PDP model of brain function. Edelman proposed that

> the brain is a *selective* system that processes sensorimotor information through the temporally coordinated interactions of collections or repertoires of functionally equivalent units each consisting of a small group of neurons. According to the model developed here, the brain processes sensory signals and its own stored information upon the selective base in a phasic (cyclic) and re-entrant manner that is capable of generating the necessary conditions of conscious states.[49]

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[48] The PDP model of brain functioning is a description of the physical infrastructure of the brain. Its metaphorical analogies stem from the model's subsequent use in artificial intelligence models of programming. It is notable that artificial neural networks have, unlike their serial antecedents, successfully been 'trained' to recognise emotion when 'viewing' films. Pia Tikka, Aleksander Valjamae, Aline W. de Borst, Roberto Pugliese, Niklas Ravaja, Mauri Kaipainen and Tapio Takala, 'Enactive Cinema Paves Way for Understanding Complex Real-Time Social Interaction in Neuroimaging Experiments', *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 6 (2012) <http://dx.doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2012.00298>.

[49] Gerald M. Edelman, 'Group Selection and Phasic Reentrant Signalling: A Theory of Higher Brain Function', in Edelman and Mountcastle, eds., pp. 51-95 (p. 52).

The massively parallel, distributed processing system of the brain is, in Edelman's view, selective. That is to say that not all of the information sensed by the body causes a distinct response or successfully makes it to consciousness. In fact, 'far less than 1% of the information taken in by the nervous system' is able to action a cognitive or physical response in the recipient body.[50] Indeed, psychologists and neuroscientists have long noted a diminished capability of human beings to be able to successfully and quickly perform multiple tasks at once. As Elizabeth A. Styles notes, 'here we have a paradox. The brain is apparently unlimited in its ability to process information, yet human performance is severely limited even when asked to do two very simple tasks at once'.[51] It seems natural, therefore, to make a claim for selectivity in the functioning of the brain. The PDP model proposed by Mountcastle would allow for the massive parallel processing of information on a large scale, while the interconnections between sensory areas would allow for a selective system as each sensation is cross-checked, matched, grouped and interpreted in light of the other sensations also being processed.

The most interesting, and controversial, aspect of Edelman's proposition, however, is the notion that the behaviour of the interconnected neural circuits – that crucially process information in parallel, in a nonlinear fashion and in association with 'stored information' that manifests in what humans know as 'memory' – generates the necessary conditions for consciousness. In this model 'consciousness is *not* a property of the entire brain, but rather is a result of *processes* occurring in certain defined areas'.[52] Consciousness is not a realm or a mental space, as it is often characterised in philosophy, but an emergent property of the functioning of the human brain. The mind – that incorporeal container of our subjective consciousness – is inextricably linked to the neuro-architecture of the brain and may be viewed as an emergent property of the complex function of our neurophysiology.

What this theory does not propose, and what is not supported by the experimental data (of functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) or positron

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[50] D. E. Berlyne, 'The Development of the Concept of Attention in Psychology', in *Attention in Neurophysiology*, ed. by C. R. Evans and T. B. Mulholland (London: Butterworths, 1969), pp. 1-26 (p. 8).
[51] Elizabeth A. Styles, *The Psychology of Attention* (Hove: Psychology Press, 1997), p. 116.
[52] Edelman, p. 74.

emission topography (PET) studies) is that the mind is entirely reducible to the brain or that human beings can be reduced to brains in jars with their entire experience simulated artificially. The PDP model set forth by Mountcastle and Edelman, and subsequently developed by Randall C. O'Reilly and Yuko Munakata (among others), is an example of a 'graded, random, adaptive, interactive, (nonlinear) network' that finds its *basic infrastructure* in the neural circuitry of the human brain.[53] That neural circuitry is not inflexible as studies of the foetal rerouting of visual and auditory cortices have shown.[54] Brain tissue function is not set at birth but has a limited type of plasticity inherent within it. Furthermore, sensory and neural experiences shape the strength of the connections between the various circuits in the human brain, thus allowing the PDP model to draw upon the notion of 'graded' inputs. The relative strength of neural impulses through the network determines the likelihood of those impulses being attended to or grouped with other impulses.

To take an extreme view one could propose, as Jaak Panksepp has, that,

> in the beginning, our higher neocortical brain, for all intents and purposes, is a *tabula rasa* of seemingly endless fields of self-similar columnar 'chips' that are programmed by subcortical processes. Thus, practically everything that emerges in our higher neocortical apparatus arises from life experiences rather than genetic specializations.[55]

What Panksepp is suggesting is that the higher levels of the human brain – the neocortex that is absent in many other species of animal lacking the 'higher order thought' that humans are capable of (abstract reasoning, conceptualisation, certain functions of memory) – are essentially 'blank'. The cortex is organised into local circuits that connect with neighbouring ones to create larger networks but their specialisation is not prefigured. Each person's higher-level brain function is programmed by his or her subjective experience such that the way in which an

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[53] Randall C. O'Reilly and Yuka Munakata, *Computational Explorations in Cognitive Neuroscience: Understanding the Mind by Simulating the Brain* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2000), p. 10.

[54] C. U. M. Smith, *Biology of Sensory Systems* (Chichester: Wiley, 2000), p. 29. In these cases, areas of brain tissue were rerouted to different sensory organs via neuron repositioning. Some nerve fibres from the eye actually connected with brain tissue in the auditory cortex while nerve fibres from the ear connected with tissue in the visual cortex. Each rerouted section of cortex went on to develop some features of the other: the rerouted auditory cortex had characteristics of the visual cortex, and vice versa.

[55] Jaak Panksepp, 'The Basic Emotional Circuits of Mammalian Brains: Do Animals Have Affective Lives?', *Neuroscience and Biobehavioural Reviews*, 35 (2011), 1791-1804 (p. 1795).

individual thinks is shaped by their sociocultural situation as well as their neurophysiology. Whilst on the surface, this may seem a cogent reason for *not* attending to the neurophysiological architecture one must bear in mind that although life experience shapes the neuronal connections and programs the neural circuits, it cannot alter the very structure of those circuits. Irrespective of life experience each human being has a relatively homogenous central and peripheral nervous system, they share the same sensory apparatus and have the same arrangement of organs and limbs.[56] No amount of life experience would result in the remodelling of the human nervous system, just as no amount of life experience will enable a human to see the wide range of light perceptible by the Mantis Shrimp (including infrared and ultraviolet light, artificial technologies notwithstanding). As a result, 'there is freedom ('free will' or 'free agency') in [a PDP system] – the freedom is in the selective grammar of the neuronal groups – but this freedom is not limitless'.[57] No two brains are the same and human beings are not clones but we can only function within a certain spectrum of behaviour. We cannot suddenly exist, sense or perceive beyond the boundaries of our material bodies but nor can we be reduced to the sum parts of those bodies. The methodology inherent within the PDP model of human brain function and cognition relies upon a two-stage process. Stage one is based on the principle of reductionism – 'reducing phenomena into component pieces'.[58] Mountcastle sets out this reduction for the neuroscientific account of the human brain as the seemingly homologous cortex has been reduced to its neural networks. Stage two proceeds to reconstructionism, of 'using those pieces to reconstruct the larger phenomenon'.[59] This is enacted by Edelman's theory of the emergence of consciousness from the function of the neural circuits of the human brain. What results in both cases is a preliminary separation of two levels of description, or a 'bi-level physical reductionist/reconstructionist hierarchy, with a lower level consisting of

[56] Certain disabilities and birth deformities can alter the arrangement of organs and limbs, sometimes radically, but the homogeneity of the human nervous system is relatively stable. Indeed, the malformation of the human nervous system results in life threatening and limiting conditions – spina bifida, anencephaly and encaphalocele – associated with deformity of the structures that encase the central nervous system (spinal vertebrae, the skull, meninges). Although such conditions often result in premature death, the structure of the nervous system itself – the brain in the head region, the central spinal cord, peripheral nerve branches and motoric nerves – is not radically altered. One cannot, as yet, be born with the nervous system of an arachnid, for example.
[57] Edelman, p. 87.
[58] O'Reilly and Munakata, p. 3.
[59] O'Reilly and Munakata, p. 3. Incidentally, all scientific endeavour adopts this two-part framework, thus negating accusations of biological determinism.

neurobiological mechanisms, and an upper level consisting of *cognitive phenomena'*.[60]

The phenomenon that we call the human mind is not located in either the neurobiological mechanisms that underpin it, or in the cognitive phenomena that occur as a result of it, but somewhere in between the two. Neurobiology has a *bottom-up* effect that transmits information, constrained and limited by the materiality of the architecture itself, 'up' towards the cognitive sphere. At the same time, the cognitive sphere has a *top-down* effect, transmitting previously stored and recalled information in the form of codas, schemata and memory 'down' towards the neurobiological sphere. Somewhere between the two levels the information travelling in both directions collides, mingles, causes adaptations to one another and generates the condition that we commonly think of as *consciousness*. All conscious processes are influenced both physiologically and psychosocially and, as such, neurobiology and psychology have equally valid contributions to make to the study of mind, cognition and behaviour.

This thesis adopts a similar model to investigate the viewing process: the viewing experience is likened to the emergent mind and is influenced by psychosocial factors – including but not limited to cultural elements that may be found within a film, such as the representation of power hierarchies – and by physiological factors. The following chapters focus primarily upon stage one of the method outlined above – the reduction of the phenomenon into its component pieces – as this is the preliminary stage of a manifold conceptual inquiry. For the purposes of this introduction, however, we now need to return to psychoanalysis in light of the corporeal aspects of the 'mind'. The practical implications of the embodied mind will be illuminated through detailed analysis of a psychoanalytic dynamic that is often applied to the horror genre: Julia Kristeva's *abject*. The following, therefore, seeks to identify the physiological influence upon Kristeva's theory and demonstrate the way in which the fusion of physiology and psychology can augment and advance a viewer-centred analysis of contemporary horror film.

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[60] O'Reilly and Munakata, p. 6. It is preliminary, of course, because the ultimate aim is to reintegrate the two levels into a phenomenal whole. While each level can be helpful in explicating the other, the dynamism of human experience lies not in their points of difference or similarity but in their ultimate synergy with one another.

An Evolution of Horror Criticism

Psychoanalysis, it needs to be stressed, is not a disembodied intellectual activity. Freud's work, in its day, offered a rigorous and controversially embodied model of the mind as an entity that developed from physical experience. Freud attempted to recognise and reconcile a connection between biology and psychology in his early writings for an unfinished thesis later titled *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (written c.1895). By 1915, however, he seemed to have accepted that explication of these connections was beyond the scope of the physical or psychological disciplines at that time.

> Research has afforded irrefutable proof that mental activity is bound up with the function of the brain as with that of no other organ. The discovery of the unequal importance of the different parts of the brain and their individual relations to particular parts of the body and to intellectual activities takes us a step further – we do not know how big a step. But every attempt to deduce from these facts a localization of mental processes, every endeavour to think of ideas as stored up in nerve-cells and of excitations as travelling along nerve-fibres, has completely miscarried.[61]

We are now in a position, of course, to explain precisely how excitations travel along nerve fibres. We have isolated the neurotransmitters that facilitate this process and have identified gradations in the speed and strength of the functioning of nerve fibres. The PDP model of brain function goes some way to putting in place the foundations for an explanation of how abstract notions such as ideas can be 'stored up' in nerve cells. There are medical techniques that now allow us to see brain activity as a subject undertakes a specific task (fMRI and PET scans) and even allow us to compare brain activity in response to the same task across a range of participants.

One such study dealing specifically with film viewing was undertaken by Uri Hasson et al., and published in 2008 in the film journal *Projections*. Hasson et al. performed functional-MRI scans on participants as they watched a clip from Sergio

[61] Sigmund Freud, 'Project for a Scientific Psychology', in *The Origins of Psycho-Analysis: Letters to Wilhelm Fliess, drafts and notes: 1887-1902*, ed. by Marie Bonaparte, Anna Freud, Ernst Kris, trans. by Eric Mosbacher and James Strachey (New York: Basic, 1954), pp. 347-445 (p. 349-50).

Leone's *The Good, The Bad and the Ugly* (1966). The fMRI scanner took continuous images showing where brain activity occurred over time. Using a novel methodology of inter-subjective correlation (ISC) analysis, Hasson and his colleagues compared brain activity similarities across their test-subjects. By comparing the activity in specific brain areas with well-established functions, such as the 'fusiform face area (FFA) – a region of the brain believed to be critical for face recognition', they were able to ascertain that 'the activity […] increased and decreased following a similar time course in all viewers'.[62] The fact that this brain activity was similar across participants suggests that their brains were involved in the same type of processes at the same time. When this methodology was extended to different types of film (Alfred Hitchcock Presents *Bang! You're Dead* (1961), and Larry David's *Curb Your Enthusiasm* (2000)) it was found that the similarities across participants were replicated although the overall brain activity produced was vastly different between each film both in terms of the brain areas that were active and the total quantity of cortex engaged throughout the viewing process. Where Larry David's comedy clip stimulated 18% of the cortex, Hitchcock's thriller clip stimulated 65% of the cortex.[63] What this suggests is that not only do audio-visual clips influence or direct brain activity but different genres or styles of clip achieve different levels of brain activity. When we watch a film or a television programme there is undoubtedly something occurring in our brains at the same time as something is happening in our minds.

Hasson begins the article with the intuitive statement that 'cinema takes viewers through an experience that evolves over time, grabbing their attention and triggering a sequence of perceptual, cognitive, and emotional processes'.[64] It is this precise experience that all film theory seeks to explore, unpack and in some ways explain. Most often this process is approached from a psychological or top-down perspective through an investigation of meanings or morals. What Hasson provides is a bottom-up approach that seeks to discover what happens when a viewer watches a specific type of filmmaking. The findings, however, are almost automatically scaled-up from a very basic physiological condition to a highly complex psychosocial state.

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[62] Uri Hasson, Ohad Landesman, Barbara Knappmeyer, Ignacio Vallines, Nava Rubin and David J. Heeger, 'Neurocinematics: The Neuroscience of Film', *Projections*, n.s., 2 (2008), 1-26 (p. 4).
[63] The experimenters noted that this corroborates the anecdotal evidence of Hitchcock's mastery and 'control' over his viewers but I believe more comparisons within the thriller/horror genre are required before this assertion can be strongly upheld by neurocinematics; Hasson, p. 14.
[64] Hasson, p. 1.

> There are two important implications of the finding that a movie can evoke similar time courses of brain activity across viewers. First, some films have the potency to 'control' viewers' neural responses. By 'control' we simply mean that the sequence of neural states evoked by the movie is reliable and predictable, without placing any aesthetic or ethical judgment as to whether the means to such control are desirable. Second, under the assumption that mental states are tightly related to brain states (a hypothesis that is widely believed to be true by most neuroscientists and many philosophers), controlling viewers' brain states, for our purposes, is the same as controlling their mental states including their precepts, emotions, thoughts, attitudes etc.[65]

The outline above presents an incredibly simplified version of the connectionist hypothesis that states that brain states are *correlated* with psychological states. There is no definitive proof of what causes or controls psychological states – as Freud noted nearly a century ago – but there are many correspondences that have been demonstrated between specific brain areas and mental states. This can be identified in neuroscientific theory as the 'token identity thesis' which states that 'the brain is the basic substrate of the mind […] there is a correspondence between tokens of mental states and tokens of brain states – that every time we think or feel or sense or want something there is some process occurring in our brain'. [66] It does not state that these correspondences are identical or directly causal across individuals. To claim that the brain activity that can be recorded by fMRI or PET scanners alone derives the mental state of the individual is, I believe, to reduce the individual to the sum of their biology and to negate the cogent and intrinsic effects of psychosocial factors. Similarly, focusing exclusively upon the psychosocial factors to the detriment of the physiological influences upon so-called mental states is to disembody the human being and refuse to acknowledge the inherent corporeality of our existence.

Reintegration: Mind-Brain-Body

Film theory in the contemporary age needs to adopt a framework that considers, with equal emphasis, the influence of physiological and psychosocial factors upon the viewing experience – a framework that attempts to avoid reductive

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[65] Hasson, p. 3.
[66] Naomi Goldblum, *The Brain-Shaped Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 14-15.

comparisons between 'the mind' on one hand, and 'the brain' on the other. There is no dichotomy between the mind and the brain because they are, essentially and irreducibly, parts of the same whole. It is perhaps more accurate to conceive of an adaptive mind-brain that integrates stimuli to meet the needs and desires of the individual as they navigate the physical and psychosocial landscape. This thesis seeks not to undermine theories of mind, like psychoanalysis, but to return them to the fundamental question that animates all intellectual analysis – physiological, neuroanatomical and psychological – of the human being: *how do humans 'work'?* To this end, we should not search within or beside the current critical paradigms, but beneath them to their assumptions and presumptions so that we may illuminate the ways in which the apparently disparate frameworks originate from a similar locus.

Human psychology is underpinned by physiological understanding in a most implicit and inescapable manner. Freud recognised the importance of the brain to the functioning of the mind long before neuroscience illuminated the micro-functions of neurons and sensory fibres. Lacan recognised the Real as the realm of origination, the point from which the ego is generated, on which it is based, and it is this tangible corporeality that this thesis seeks to return to film theory. Let us take, for example, Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic account of her theory of the abject. The abject, Kristeva claims, is a

> massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But not nothing either. A 'something' that I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me. On the edge of nonexistence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me. There, abject and abjection are my safeguards. The primers of my culture.[67]

The abject is a crisis of identification, a complex dynamic between self and other, object and subject. The objects of the abject are formed at a primal, preconscious stage of identity formation that finds bodily wastes, refuse, vomit, corpses, blood and other bodily fluids set against the subject as signifiers of the subject's dissolution. The

[67] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 2.

objectification of these 'somethings' is not, however, complete. They are 'not me' but they are 'not that' either – they are neither part of the subject nor wholly distinguishable as disassociated objects. It is the fluidity between the categories of self/other, object/subject that allow these abjected somethings to produce the intensely visceral reaction that humans feel in their presence. The abject is always in an intimate relation to the self.

> As in true theatre, without makeup and masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There I am at the border of my condition as a living being.[68]

Kristeva refers to a psychological process of creating the conscious construct of the self – a self that necessarily has to disassociate itself from what came before, which for psychoanalytic thought is the familial relationship to the maternal parent who becomes the first Other. Her language nevertheless invokes the very tangible physicality of the sensation of the abject. The inquiry begins with the physiological sensation of repulsion and loathing that generates bodily reactions such as nausea.[69] In essence, Kristeva's survey of the abject is a phenomenological dissection of the physiology of violent disgust: she begins with the affect and attempts to first describe what it is, to communicate its multifaceted architecture, before she then offers an explanation. This is, however, a process that is inherently blockaded by the fact that the abject originates in what Kristeva might recognise as the pre-social or pre-symbolic order and thus resists adequate expression in the terms of symbolic language. Edmund Husserl's phenomenology followed a similar methodology as it attempted to become a 'presuppositionless science of consciousness'.[70] Focusing upon phenomena as they are presented to the subjective consciousness of the perceiver Husserl's method involved a number of reductive steps that allow the individual to access and appraise the conditions through which they experience the world around them. Adapted by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and later adopted by film critic Vivian Sobchack, the phenomenal method has three phases:

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[68] Kristeva, p. 3.
[69] Kristeva, p. 31.
[70] Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 126.

> Phase 1 – the Phenomenological epoch
> 'distancing oneself […] from the taken-for-granted judgments, beliefs, and presuppositions that ground our everyday existence as "reality" and limit the possibilities for understanding the phenomena'
> (a) respond to the phenomena as experienced
> (b) discard logical presuppositions
> (c) discard presuppositions of reality
>
> Phase 2 – the eidetic reduction
> Describe and thematize the phenomena 'in the fullness and potential of [its] possibilities for experience'
>
> Phase 3 – the transcendental reduction
> The world and its constituents are isolated, described and bracketed so that what remains is the 'correlation of intentionality' that offers 'a description of the phenomena of consciousness'.[71]

Phase 1 entails the reduction of an experience to its most immediate properties, the physical feeling of revulsion generated by the abject for example, and the discarding of logical presuppositions that are attached to the phenomenon as we interpret that feeling almost simultaneously to its presentation. As soon as that roiling feeling of disassociation from one's own self begins to rise from the stomach, we attach to it the signifier 'nausea' and all the connotations that our particular schema for this physiological phenomenon entails. What phenomenology is interested in is the feeling itself, indelibly rooted in sensory neurology, and this is just what Kristeva aims to describe. A synthesis of phenomenology, neuroscience and psychoanalytic theory can expose the very foundations upon which this ambivalent experience rests, and subsequently return the phenomenal body to the experiencing subject.

The aspect of the phenomenological method that takes Kristeva's theory into the realm of the psychoanalytic is the transcendental reduction that focuses the final inquiry upon the 'correlation of intentionality' and the reception of a phenomenon by the subjective *consciousness*. Whilst aiming to uncover the properties of human experience, phenomenology itself often situates the seat of that experience within the mind and somewhat bypasses the physiological body. Indeed, since subjective consciousness was considered to be located in the mind, or ego, Husserl did not

[71] Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 36-37.

adequately consider the body until very late in his philosophical career.[72] This ambivalence towards the body was inherited to an extent by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in his own substantial phenomenological project. Although Merleau-Ponty acknowledged that 'the perceiving mind is an incarnated mind', and he sought to establish that 'one does not account for the facts by superimposing a pure, contemplative consciousness on a thinglike body' he was similarly reluctant to accept the partial explanations that scientific discovery could offer to the phenomenological endeavour.[73] The danger that Merleau-Ponty foresaw was of privileging a science that made embodied experience 'the mere perception of a quality […] the projection of the external world in the living body'.[74] Kristeva's method is precisely to outline the incredibly corporeal nature of the feeling of abjection – to highlight the physiology behind (beneath, within) the psychology. It can, therefore, be viewed as a conceptual bridge between science, philosophy and psychology as it attempts to integrate the three spheres of understanding.

When addressing the sensation of nausea, Kristeva claims that 'I give birth to myself amid the *violence* of sobs, of vomit'.[75] The abject is not just connected to the subjective consciousness but also to the body in both its acts of creation and reaction. Kristeva claims that because of the difficulty of distinguishing the abject thing from the subject, abjection is concerned with borders. It 'is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object'.[76] The primal border that enables us to conceptualise ourselves (and thus the mind) as a 'thing' is the corporeal border of our bodies. When one is attempting to use the phenomenological method to describe an experience that inextricably unites the physiology of the individual with the psychosocial processes that influence them, a consideration of that very physiology must be appropriate.

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[72] Hugh J. Silverman, *Inscriptions: Between Phenomenology and Structuralism* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), p. 21.
[73] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'An Unpublished Text by Maurice Merleau-Ponty: A Prospectus of his Work', trans. by Arleen B. Dallery, in *The Primacy of Perception*, ed. by James M. Edie (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), pp. 3-11 (p. 4).
[74] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 1962), p. 55.
[75] Kristeva, p. 3; emphasis added.
[76] Kristeva, p. 4.

If we examine Kristeva's psychoanalytic theory closely we can see that the psychological process of the construction of the subject that allows each individual to enter into the symbolic order of psychosocial life is predicated upon a set of fundamental principles. Firstly, it assumes that 'I' am a distinct entity, different from 'you' and different from 'that'. It also assumes that 'I' am discontinuous with my environment. If 'I' am discontinuous from my environment, then 'I' have a boundary. Before any psychosocial order can be established by whatever means the theory first assumes: 'I' am a *thing*, 'I' am a *distinct* thing, 'I' am a *bounded* distinct thing. Where does this knowledge come from? It originates from a place as primal as Kristeva claims the abject to be, the only place it can come from before we even acquire the concepts of 'thing', 'distinct' and 'bounded'. It comes from our bodies.

The human body is a collection of individual units – cells, nerves, tissues, organs, and organ systems – that retains its homogenous shape as a result of the structure of its various bones, muscles, tendons, ligaments and finally, its skin. Our perceptive experience as pre-social infants allows us to encounter our own bodies in fundamentally structuring ways. We realise we can move arms and legs by force of will; that most objects cannot move through our skin, but that they can inflict pain upon us; we can manipulate objects, honing fine motor skills, and we learn that when we put objects in our mouths we can receive new sensations, sometimes pleasant, sometimes not. All of these experiences, which we are not able to process within the language system of our species in the formative stages of development, structure our knowledge of the fundamental existential truth that *I am me and not that*. As a result, we are able to generate a detailed body schema – a coherent structure of understanding that draws directly upon physical experience for its governing principles. This schema conceptually reinforces the truism that 'I' am a distinct thing, so beginning the process that allows the subject to view itself as an individual, one thing among a world of many things.

Secondarily, this motor experience is reinforced by the physiology of the human eye that directs how we are able to view the world around us. The eye moves in a series of jumps (saccades) alternated with a series of pauses (fixations). During each fixation a small section of the visual field is directed upon the fovea, a portion of the retina that produces the most acute vision, and the objects in this section are more

sharply defined. As the eye moves, the previously sharp object fades in clarity, as another object becomes the focus of the fixation. As a result, the visual field appears to be comprised of distinct *things* that seem to be discontinuous with their environment. These physiological experiences combine in a body schema – a 'system of sensory motor capacities' that arise directly from physiological, and crucially pre-social, experience.[77] This schema goes towards forming the primal understanding of the individual's material existence, of their discontinuity from the parent, of their self-direction and free will. Upon socialisation and the acquisition of expressive language, this schema becomes more generalised to that of the *container schema*, which states that a container has a boundary which separates an interior from an exterior.[78]

It is only on the premise of this body schema that Kristeva's process of abjection can occur. Had the individual not previously had the very specific physiological experience of having a body of a certain sort, and more importantly a brain of a certain sort, the schema would and could never be in place. In the phenomenological reduction, one has to discard all logical presuppositions. Surely, we must also discard (at least temporarily) *consciousness* itself as the source of these presuppositions? If consciousness is an emergent property of the function of the human brain then a further reduction is in order: the reduction of conscious structures of understanding into their underlying architectural schemata. While the abject relation humans have to corpses, wastes and bodily fluids is intrinsically influenced by social systems, those very systems are predicated upon the materiality of the human species and the reaction to the abject is fundamentally embodied. Something cannot be 'not me' unless there is first a pre-concept of what 'me' is. The confusion inherent in the abject is that the abjected things cannot be adequately disassociated from me: my vomit is not me, but it is me. In fact, it is more *me* than the 'subject' that aims to repel it. What is abjected cannot be completely extricated from the self because it is an expression of the material conditions of the genesis of the subject. To deny my vomit is to deny the very basis upon which the socialised-I exists. The abject thus 'takes the ego back to its source on the abominable limits from which, in order to

[77] Mark Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 5.
[78] Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body*, p. 141.

be, the ego has broken away'.[79] It reduces the subject to its previous form, to the entity that was before the subject entered into the symbolic. And what is this source upon which the subject-ego was built if it is not pre-social embodied experience? This certainly offers an explanation for Kristeva's choice of abjected materials and accounts for the violence that she sees in the abject reactions of disgust, nausea and repulsion. Physiological experience underwrites the complex psychosocial processes of self-identification and demarcation by offering to consciousness embodied schemata of understanding that our experiences must fit if they are to be made coherent.

Sum, Ergo Cogito Sum

There is a tangible link between our physiological experience and the way in which we discern meaning; just as there is a tangible link between our psychosocial experience and way in which we discern meaning. This is based upon a theory of mind that sees the physiological brain as generating the conditions of consciousness. But the brain is not itself isolated; rather it is the point at which sensorimotor information pertaining to *all actions and behaviours of the human organism* integrates. In a very tangible sense 'we can think and act only through our bodies' and our bodies structure much more of our cognitive processes than we may realise.[80] In *Philosophy in the Flesh*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson make the claim that,

> most of our thought is unconscious, not in the Freudian sense of being repressed, but in the sense that it operates beneath the level of cognitive awareness, inaccessible to consciousness and operating too quickly to be focused on.[81]

This echoes Berlyne's earlier assertion that less than 1% of all the information that is taken in by the human brain causes a sensory or motoric reaction. The selection system suggested by Edelman's account of the human brain must be operating *somewhere* but it is not on the level of conscious awareness. Of course, psychosocial influences can greatly affect the significance of certain stimuli and increase the

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[79] Kristeva, p. 15.
[80] Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body*, p. 2.
[81] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic, 1999), p. 10.

likelihood of certain sensations entering into consciousness, but often those selective structures are based upon biologically significant mechanisms. That is, stimuli that are harmful and need to be avoided usually make it to consciousness without necessarily requiring the intervention of psychosocial processes. Similarly, startling, unexpected or incoherent stimuli also usually enter consciousness, if only to facilitate the act of making sense of them. The unity of the human being is a complex system designed specifically for *making sense* of the environment, for establishing coherences between sensations in order to survive. This process of generating meaning from sensory information is possible, precognitively, because 'meaning traffics in patterns, images, qualities, feelings', in embodied sensations that are directly 'meaningful' to the organic body.[82] It is upon the basis of these embodied meanings that conscious concepts and prepositions are built.

Physiological experience underwrites the conditions of the human mind and the structures by which we assimilate psychosocial experience but it also structures the very mechanisms by which we find and correlate *meaning* by developing a range of embodied schemata that are irrevocably tied to physiology. The *container* schema is one of the most fundamental that will be discussed in this thesis as it gives structure to horror's themes of proper and improper use of the human body, but it is joined by movement schema (*source-path-goal*, *up-down*, *into-out of*, *toward-away from* and *straight-curved*), orientation schema (*front-back*, *top-bottom*, and *balance*), as well as schematically structured metaphors (*the body as container*, *the body as fortress* and *up is positive*). These physiological schematic modes of comprehension are projected upwards as psychosocial schemata are projected downwards in the conscious process of viewing a film. When watching a human body onscreen, the recognition of its humanness is structured by the *container* schema, which in turn associates the *into-out of* schema that allows us to ascertain what it is and what should and should not happen to it. The subsequent (and apparently inevitable with this genre) evisceration of the body and the projection of its innards to the outside environment contradict both schematic understandings and the act is recognised accordingly as *improper*. Simultaneously, psychosocial experience allows us to attach a gender to the body, along with all the connotations that the signifier brings, which furnishes us with

[82] Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body*, p. 9.

sociocultural reasons why eviscerating human bodies is wrong (lawlessness, decay, disease, lack of hygiene, lack of compassion) and the result of both influences is the psycho-physiological response of shock, fear or terror.

Rather than overwriting film theory with scientific theory, or indeed vice versa, a comprehensive methodology should allow for adequate recognition of both, as they exist in a state of synthesis with one another. In order for this methodology to be rigorous and complete a reduction needs to be made in the initial stages but this reduction occurs only with the intention of generating a fuller understanding of the nuanced influences that both sides of the spectrum bring to this exploration of the film viewing experience. In relation to film, the psychological function of the medium and of individual narratives has been consistently and coherently theorised but the influence of bodily sensation and embodied knowledge appears to have fallen by the wayside. As neuroscience continues to bring new, non-invasive techniques to researchers the ways in which the architecture of the brain structures and influences the mind are becoming more and more apparent. It is upon this relationship that this thesis will focus as it illuminates the bodily sensations that are encoded within contemporary horror film. What this project seeks to do is find the tangible threads that link our primary physiological experience with the psychosocial experience of viewing a film. The following chapters will address a range of contemporary horror films in relation to a selection of sensory modalities.

Chapter one, ‘Re-vision: The Eye and the Body’, will attend to the primary cinematic sense of vision. It will be argued that the eyes never operate in isolation but are always integrated with other sensory organs. Focusing upon Elias Ganster’s *Gut* (2012) and John Erick Dowdle’s *The Poughkeepsie Tapes* (2007) the specific ways in which the tactile sense of touch is embedded in vision will be explored. It will be proposed that the stylised cinematography of ‘found footage’ films enacts a re-embodying of vision that highlights the ways in which sight is indelibly connected to the senses, body and mind of the viewer. Extending the notion of cross-modality, analysis of Rob Zombie’s *House of 1,000 Corpses* (2003) will explore the phenomenal synthesis of audio-vision in contemporary cinema. It will be argued that bravura editing replete with multisensory juxtapositions introduces audio-visual

malleability – a type of sensorial exchange – that creates a distinctively ambivalent viewing experience.

Chapter two, 'Vestibular Manipulation', will explore the sensations of *balance* and *orientation*. It will be proposed that the vestibular sense of balance is the sense that most closely interacts with and disturbs vision. Both the primacy and the immediacy of balance to the stability and locomotion of the human body enable the experience to act as a primer to orientation-based metaphorical structures of understanding. Providing analysis of Marcus Dunstan's *The Collector* (2009), it will be contended that vestibular manipulation, combined with counterintuitive stimulation in the visual and auditory spheres, simulates sensory crises of balance. The ways in which this physiological experience interacts with the metaphorical concept of *balance* will be explored through a reading of Neil Marshall's *The Descent* (2005). It will be proposed that the interaction between sensory stimulation and metaphorical simulation amplifies the communication of the extreme bodily sensation depicted in, and through, the film.

In chapter three, 'From the Haptic to the Somatic', the physiological sensation of *gustation*, a term that involves smell, taste and the visceral 'touch' of the inner digestive system will be discussed. It will be contended that *The Human Centipede* (2009) and *The Human Centipede II* (2011) invoke, and at times visually and tactilely manifest, the human digestive system in all its physiological and psychosocial abjection. The interplay between the sensory modalities that allows this manifestation will be explicated in order to demonstrate how the contravention of the *body as a container* metaphor and the *into-out of* body schemata contribute to the psychosocial construction of human waste.

Chapter four, 'Pain', will address the bodily sensation that continues to haunt horror film. Offering detailed analysis of Pascal Laugier's *Martyrs* (2008) and Adam Rehmeier's *The Bunny Game* (2010) it will be contended that rather than pain being incommunicable, as Elaine Scarry and other theorists have suggested, it finds its shareability in the mechanisms of the sensation itself. Drawing upon Ronald Melzack's 'neuromatrix' theory of pain it will be proposed that pain in horror film *has* to be embodied by multi-layered combinations of sensory stimuli. Moreover, it

will be argued that the embodiment of pain in the cinematic experience provides the stage upon which its metaphorical significations are acted out. Pain ‘means’ because it is felt.

Finally, a detailed portrait of the sensorial body of the cinematic viewer will emerge, not as a purely biological object but as a multifarious, extant being that engages with film on multiple levels. The physiological landscape covered in the preceding chapters will be excavated and the ways in which bodily sensation structures and drives the viewing experience in this intensely embodied cinematic genre will be evaluated. The architectural foundations upon which conscious interaction with film texts occurs will be uncovered and areas of psychosocial inquiry that may provide the conceptual bridges between bodily sensation and the complex totality of human cinematic experience will be proposed.

Chapter 1 – Re-Vision, The Eye and The Body

In her seminal study of the slasher film, Carol Clover explains that 'horror privileges eyes because, more crucially than any other kind of cinema, it is about eyes'.[1] With its persistent interest in the demonisation of vision (*Peeping Tom* [1960]; *The Ring* [1998]; *The Eye* [2008]; *Julia's Eyes* [2010]; *Occulus* [2014]); its attack on the eyeball (*The Beyond* [1981] *The New York Ripper* [1982], *May* [2002], *Hostel* [2005], *Saw II* [2005] and *Saw VII* [2010] and *Repo! The Genetic Opera* [2012]); its fondness for the blind monster (*Alien* [1979]; *The Thing* [1982]; *Jeepers Creepers* [2001]; the Crawlers of *The Descent* [2005]; the nurses of *Silent Hill* [2006]; *The Mist* [2007]); and its preoccupation with the mechanics of looking and technologies of surveillance (*The Ring* [2002], *My Little Eye* [2002], the *Saw* series [2004-2011], *Feed* [2005], *The Poughkeepsie Tapes* [2007], *Sinister* [2011], *The Task* [2011], *Gut* [2012], *The Bay (II)* [2012]) the ocularcentricity of the horror genre cannot be denied. Yet – and this is the animating principle of my thesis – this singling out of vision as the sense *par excellence* of horror neglects to consider the fundamental physiological concept that no one or two senses are isolated in the dynamic and continual sensory experience of the human body. Scopic isolationism, or visual exceptionalism simplifies and distorts (to use an inappropriately optical trope) the film experience.

Despite the specialised senses – sight, smell, taste, touch and hearing – having organs, tissues and nerve fibres specifically adapted for and dedicated to the detection and relay of modality-specific stimuli, the anatomy of the brain does not support the theory of independent senses. The parallel distributed processing model of brain function states that the cortex of the brain is organised into neural circuits, which are adept at performing certain sensorimotor functions. As a result, the brain has multiple sensory areas that are principally involved in the detection and processing of a particular sensory input. These areas are not, however, functionally isolated as 'each primary sensory area […] sends information to adjacent regions, called the sensory association cortex' and these sensory cortices in turn receive information from more than one primary sensory area.[2] The visual association cortex found in the occipital

[1] Carol Clover, 'The Eye of Horror', in *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film*, ed. by Linda Williams (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994), pp. 184-230 (p. 185).
[2] Neil R. Carlson, *Foundations of Behavioural Neuroscience*, 8th edn (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011), p. 69.

lobe receives information from the primary visual sensory area as well as the auditory association cortex of the temporal lobe and the somatosensory association cortex of the parietal lobe. It is by virtue of these interconnected association cortices that sensory information is integrated and can be cross-referenced between modalities. Such integration is instantaneous and preconscious, that is to say that the coherence one experiences between the visual and audible aspects of a sound film, for example, is phenomenally accurate because the integration occurs automatically and without pause between the stimulation of the sensory organs and the resulting perception.[3] That automaticity, however, can be manipulated by the concomitant presentation of juxtaposed, discontinuous or, to use Michel Chion's terms, *anempathetic* cross-modal stimuli.[4] Such sensorial manoeuvring can interfere with the integration of those stimuli in order to disturb the coherence of sensory experience.

The human senses, rather than being segregated into a series of distinct modalities, are perhaps more accurately viewed as 'permeable envelopes, folding onto and into one another'.[5] They are not directly translatable, one cannot see what one can hear – except, arguably, in clinical cases of synaesthesia whereby input from one sense becomes mistranslated by neural connections resulting in a perceptual output in a different modality (for example, a patient may hear the note middle C and see the colour red) – but each modality works in combination with others to enable the individual to build a dynamic, multisensory model of the phenomenon in question. There is no such thing as an exclusively visual experience. If this critical position is applied to film, the focus within occularcentric film criticism inherently overlooks the additional senses that provide the individual with valuable information concerning both their own bodies and the objects and events they perceive and experience.

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[3] A distinction is needed here between sensation – the physiological process of sensing something with the specialised or generalised organs of the body – and perception – the psychological, or conscious, interpretation of those sensations into a meaningful array of information.

[4] Michel Chion, *Audio-vision: Sound on Screen*, ed. by Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 8. An example of the manipulation of sensory inputs can be found in the McGurk illusion. When simply heard, the English phonemes 'ba' and 'da' are quite distinct. When teamed with incongruent visual information, however, the two sounds can be transposed so that when one sees the mouth shape for 'da' that is the phoneme that is 'heard', even if the sound being played is actually 'ba' and vice versa. In this instance, vision takes precedence over hearing to alter the interpretation of the auditory input and change what the individual 'hears'.

[5] Jennifer M. Barker, 'Out of Synch, Out of Sight: Synaesthesia and Film Spectacle', *Paragraph*, 31 (2008), pp. 236-251 (p. 238).

It is upon this basis that I wish to issue a challenge to traditional understandings of vision in film studies. Drawing upon horror films that foreground the dynamics of looking, including Elias Ganster's *Gut* (2012) and John Erick Dowdle's *The Poughkeepsie Tapes* (2007), I will first explore the relationship between vision and the tactile sense of touch. Focusing upon the mechanisms of visual limitation and distortion within the found footage subgenre, it will be contended that explicit and sustained manipulation of the image results in the disintegration of visual coherence that invites a tactile, haptic mode of looking. Extending this notion of cross-modality, I will then explore the synthesis of audio-vision in Rob Zombie's *House of 1,000 Corpses* (2003). It will be proposed that rather than simply complementing one another, the integration of modalities in bravura editing techniques provides an element of sensorial exchange as the modalities cross over, mingle and augment one another. It will be proposed that, as a phenomenon in its own right, a film is not merely *watched* by the spectator but *experienced* through multiple senses simultaneously and that these combinations of stimuli can augment the interpretation of a film, creating a distinctly ambivalent viewing experience. Whilst the primary sense of filmic experience may be vision, the eye itself allows malleable access to a range of other sensory modalities through neural connections and psychosocial associations. The cinematic medium's ability to replicate the multisensory experience of everyday life constitutes a significant augmentation of the aesthetics of film stylistics that necessitates the reinstatement of a holistic sensorial body in theories of spectatorship.

The Eyes Are Not Alone

Marion Crane (Janet Leigh) has checked into the Bates' Motel in Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960). Following a light supper with proprietor Norman Bates (Anthony Perkins) she returns to her room to shower and sleep. Listening to the sounds of her movements through the wall – a combination of light thuds and shuffling accompanied by a quiet violin soundtrack – Norman approaches a framed picture. He removes it from the wall to reveal a peephole. He leans forward and peers through the hole, high-pitched violins begin to play long, tremolo notes as he watches Marion, who stands perfectly central in a frame that is now edged with the blurred

black outline of the peephole. In the reverse shot, Norman's face is fragmented, his eye highlighted by the light coming from Marion's room (Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1: Norman Bates' Optical Fascination in *Psycho* (1960)

The shallow focus directs the viewer's attention to the fine details of Norman's eye: the wet glint of the eyeball, the delicate fringe of lashes surrounding it and the subtle texture of adjacent skin. The repetition of the circular pupil in both Norman's eye and the artificial peephole replicates visually the hierarchy of spectatorship that is generated as the viewer watches the voyeur watching the object of his affections. In a reflexive layering of vision that is typical of the horror genre, the image of Marion that the extra-diegetic viewer receives is transmitted through the eye of the peephole, the eye of the filmic antagonist and the eye of the camera.

Yet the viewer does not simply *see* this scene. Norman's eye is situated to the far left of the visual field in a position that emphasises the concealed nature of his voyeurism but decreases the power of his gaze as it alights upon an object outside of the visual frame. His eye may be probing and illicit but it is also restricted and distanced, its power to discover and control ultimately limited by its vantage point. Without the benefit of a facial expression, Norman's emotions are unclear. The strings that provide the soundtrack, however, offer more of an indication as to his motivation as they rise from a low timbre to a high tremolo. The increased vibration of the string suggests an increase in tension as the audible movement of the note is

superimposed upon the movements of Norman's eye, and the implied sexual tension of his voyeuristic gaze. The intimacy of the images of both Norman's eye and Marion's undressed body – dominated by the presence of skin, the organ of touch – appeals to the tactile nature of human textural experience in such a way that this short scene is principally *felt* rather than only seen.

The technologies of the cinema – in this case visual and audio technologies – converge to allow and encourage a multisensory viewing experience. Although this scene does replicate the masterful and gendered look that Laura Mulvey identifies in her 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' essay – particularly the assaultive voyeuristic gaze inscribed within the mechanics of the cinema which suggests a scopophilic pleasure for the viewer – that is not all that this scene achieves. Like the infamous eye-cutting scene from Salvador Dalí and Luis Buñuel's *Un Chien Andalou* (1929), the wet and soft eyeball connotes the tactile sense in its gleam, its movement and its sheer primacy in the scenario. This primacy is intuitive: the eye is the principal human sense organ, it allows us access to the world, it facilitates movement, experience shows us that it is tender, fragile and perhaps most disturbingly, not entirely solid. The eye of horror – the eye that watches, pursues, attacks and is attacked – is a primary operator in the conceptualisation of the material world and a principal means of accessing our own organic natures. An attack upon the eye – whether literally in horror film narratives or figuratively through the assault on the viewer's gaze – is necessarily an attack deeply embedded in embodied knowledge and understanding. Losing our eyes is symbolically tantamount to losing ourselves – a symbolism literalised in Victor Salva's *Jeepers Creepers* (2001) as Derry loses his eyes and his life – and this experience of un-existence is grounded in the most violent and organic reactions of terror that structure many horror films. Not all attacks upon eyes are so explicit in their violence, however, and one subtle disturbance to the primacy and safety of vision that has proven successful has been the found-footage subgenre. Questioning the reliable cohesion of vision with sensory contrasts and overload, this subgenre invites the body into the viewing experience through combinations of visual fascination and disturbance.

The found-footage horror film was popularised by Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez's *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), which presented hand-held video camera

footage lacking in many of the Hollywood conventions of style, form and narrative. The 'found' footage of *The Blair Witch Project* was presented ambiguously to the audience to the extent that many were initially unsure whether it was real footage that had been discovered, or a mock-documentary feature film. Found-footage film uses stylistic devices to appeal to a sense of authenticity including: shaky camera work, dropped or unseated cameras, unconventional camera angles, unstable colours that alternate between full colour, partial colour and monochromatic schemes, abrupt cuts between scenes and sections, video decay effects to depict age or damage and unusual or absent soundtracks. Although made popular in the late 1990s, these techniques have been utilised in extreme horror film for many years in an attempt to portray realistic and shocking violence.

Ruggero Deodato's *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980), for example, depicts the making of a documentary to explain the disappearance of a group of American filmmakers attempting to reach the native tribes of the Amazon rainforest. The documentary is assembled from the film reels that are recovered from the rainforest. The surrounding film retains hallmarks of what has become the conventional style of Hollywood-inspired filmmaking: carefully constructed scenes, smooth camera tracks and pans with seamless soundtracks. The rediscovered footage, however, is characterised by shaky camera movements, the lack or superimposition of sound at a later date and poorly composed scenes as the camera often moves behind trees, huts and other people to manoeuvre through the rainforest. The resistance to classical cinematic techniques represents a break in what might be considered normalcy: the filmmakers were in a hostile and unknown environment and the uneasiness of the cinematic style denotes instability and apprehension. It also, however, denotes volatility and savagery as much of the extreme violence is contained within these found footage segments. At moments of high violence, the camera is often most unstable as the operator runs, falls or breaks the film and the scene cuts abruptly.

The techniques of found-footage films combine sensory stimuli – light, shade, balance, movement, sound – in such a way that the viewing experience is disturbed. The film loses itself in its own format as the technologies of the cinema break through to assault the viewer in a way that mimics the violence, or frenzy of emotion, often portrayed in these scenes. There is a connotative link in many horror titles between

the force of physical violence and the force of emotion or sensation. Scenes portrayed in the typically unsteady found-footage style often depict terror or the fight-or-flight response – most often flight, as in the case of an iconic scene from *The Blair Witch Project* that sees the protagonists fleeing through the forest at night-time. They also frequently contain extreme violence which is either shown in graphic detail or is performed with the camera; *The Last Exorcism* (2010), for example, contains a harrowing scene of a cat being beaten to death with the camera. In addition to these intense physiological states, they frequently portray inappropriate sexual activity as in the case of *Cannibal Holocaust* when two of the missing filmmakers have intercourse as native tribes people burn to death behind them. Physical and emotive force is mingled in the movement of the camera as sensorial stimulation reinforces the increasingly frantic and desperate nature of the narrative events. The more extreme the content, the more effective the forceful sensory manipulation is.[6] In these moments – scarce but pertinent in Ruggero's film, continuous and almost nauseating in Myrick and Sánchez's – the 'advanced representation system' that Laura Mulvey identifies in the cinema (that allows high-level psychological processes to enact empathic emotion in the viewer) breaks down and is replaced by an altogether more immediate physiological experience.[7] In engaging the viewer's body so explicitly the perception of the film becomes embodied in such a way that,

> the film experience [becomes] a system of communication based on bodily perception as a vehicle of conscious expression. It entails the visible, audible, kinetic aspects of sensible experience to make sense visibly, audibly and haptically.[8]

At these points of sensory engagement – that Laura U. Marks identifies as *haptic*, a term I shall return to and explain fully later in this chapter – the complex and reflexive process of psychological identification and interpretation fade as the body comes into clearer focus as the mode of delivery. That is not to say that Ruggero's film ceases to be a commentary on the nature of savagery in the so-called civilised

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[6] This connection between the frantic motion of the camera and the power of emotion or violence in a scene is one of the many horror tropes parodied by the *Scary Movie* franchise (2000-2013), which often foregrounds the gregarious and unnecessary actions of the camera as it, for example, zooms in and collides with characters during tense scenes.

[7] Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Visual and Other Pleasures*, 2nd edn (London: Palgrave, 2009 [1989]), pp. 14-30 (p. 15).

[8] Vivian Sobchack, 'Phenomenology and the Film Experience', in *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film*, ed. by Linda Williams (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994), pp. 36-58 (p. 41).

world during these scenes but that, momentarily, the viewer's ideological biases are surpassed as the single uniting feature of 'savage' and 'civilised', the human body, is mobilised as the primary vehicle of meaning. The scenes of fear and violence in found footage films are literally assaultive: they assault the viewer's senses. Not all horror strives to explicitly manipulate the senses in this manner and the haptic – the tactile – can be stimulated through more subtle techniques. The look, any look, is never simply a matter for the eyes and mind. Each look is embodied and exists in an existentially unique cradle of physiological, psychological, social and cultural interconnections that give rise to the individual.

The Look of the Spectator

Elias Ganster's *Gut* (2012) is a found-footage film that focuses the viewer's attention upon the mechanics of watching without making use of the traditional style of the subgenre. It depicts the relationship between childhood friends Tom and Dan. Tom is married with a young daughter. He is bored of his mundane office job and is drifting further away from Dan. Dan is a horror film fan and he repeatedly invites Tom to watch the latest horror release with him. In a quest to stay abreast of the latest horror developments, Dan lists his PO Box address on an Internet forum asking for specific out of production films and new releases. What he receives, however, is a batch of anonymous discs of found-footage depicting the evisceration of female bodies. He shares the discs with Tom and the film follows their respective reactions. Their viewing experience is complicated, however, when the victims become people Tom and Dan know – Dan's new girlfriend Sally and eventually, Tom's wife and daughter.

The footage Dan initially receives lasts only a few seconds and depicts a female torso in close-up, the palette appears to be dulled as both skin and the white sheet behind display a faint blue tint and the shot remains in deep focus so that the fine textural details can be clearly seen (Figure 1.2). Blemishes and shadows upon the skin are shown as a male hand, covered in a smooth latex glove, moves into the frame. It travels down the central axis, slowly, as a finger delicately traces the

contours of the moving torso. Sweat appears to be pooling around the stomach of the victim and the tracing finger smears the droplets as it continues its descent.

Figure 1.2: Still of the Found Footage from *Gut* (2012)

The soundtrack that accompanies this clip is comprised of muffled whimpering, presumably of the victim, and the gasps of air they draw as panic begins to rise. The hand moves off screen at the bottom of the frame and the shot cuts to Tom and Dan as they watch the clip. Tom reclines on the sofa, brows slightly furrowed with the blue tint composing an artfully artificial array of shading across his features that only heightens the air of confused attraction expressed in his face. Dan leans forward, eyes searching and lips slightly parted in a more recognisable display of pleasurable fascination. The two are silent as the whimpering continues to dominate the soundscape. Another cut returns to the footage as the hand reappears holding a small, curved blade. The smoothness of the metal contrasts with the blemished skin and the textured sheet it lays upon. The blade is drawn down the torso, in the same track the wandering fingers took a moment earlier as a brief cut (all puns intended) again shows Tom and Dan, their reactions constant as deep crimson spills from the newly opened wound, and the whimpering gives way to gargled retching. As the blood runs across the skin and stains the sheet, the hand, now without its latex cover, slowly and repeatedly penetrates the wound. Another cut shows Tom and Dan still watching, fascinated, as a disturbing wet sound becomes the soundtrack. The static camera neither moves to show what lies on the periphery nor zooms to enhance details of the penetrative act yet the deep focus ensures that all details are maintained with equal

clarity and importance. Although this marks a stylistic break from the found-footage traditions of unsteady camera work, the perspective nevertheless reinforces the same questionable visual precedence found in *Cannibal Holocaust*. The shaky camera of Deodato's found-footage succeeds in both presenting a specifically situated visual representation of the purported events and obscuring large parts of the events that may alter the subsequent interpretation of the footage. This subjective framing is highlighted in the narrative by the inter-diegetic viewing of previous 'news' footage shot by the same crew that was, in fact, artificially staged: a fiction presented as reality, much like Deodato's own reflexive attempt in *Cannibal Holocaust*. *Gut*'s static camera achieves much the same end without manoeuvring through the realm of authentically amateurish recording. The visual field remains both specifically situated and, to a large degree, obscured from the viewer as Tom and Dan are locked into a perspective in which motion, and the ability to look away, is implicitly prohibited.

The static camera fragments both the body of the victim and the bodies of the inter-diegetic viewers as it serves a dual function: firstly, the camera replicates the characters' inability to look away, tying the inter- and extra-diegetic viewers together; secondly, it reproduces a controlling gaze that objectifies the onscreen image by ordering its fragmentation. This type of static, fragmentary looking could be said to display what Laura Mulvey terms 'a hermetically sealed world' that affords 'the spectator an illusion of looking in' where the focus is very much upon the *look*.[9] The segregated scopic space, contained within the boundaries of the screens and cameras that constitute it encourages an almost textbook example of the psychoanalytical prescription of the voyeuristic look and scopophilic gaze. This type of fascinated, masterful gazing is certainly evident in Tom and Dan's reactions to the footage (Figure 1.3). The blue overlay that dominates makes the very act of viewing illicit as it brings forth connotations of pornography: this, literally, is a blue movie.

[9] Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure', p. 17.

Figure 1.3: Visual Fetishisation of Protagonist, Dan

The camera that records the victim objectifies her, but the camera that records Tom and Dan also objectifies them. This foregrounding of the mechanics of vision ensures that all avenues of looking in *Gut* are contained within, and constrained by, the visual technologies that enable it. While Mulvey's theory of spectatorship focuses upon the second function of the static camera, and indeed may posit the first function as a property of the controlling gaze the camera replicates, I would like to suggest that the prolonged and continuous stasis of the camera in *Gut* serves an alternative function to fragmentation and objectification. Western film tradition has rendered camera movement, pans, tracks, tilts and zooms, something of a norm. The found footage subgenre of horror has promoted almost hysterical amounts of movement as an acceptable and effective vehicle for intensifying fear, dread and terror. The fact that the camera in *Gut* remains stationary serves to highlight the staged nature of the image by contradicting the innate primacy of motion.

The human eye and brain is designed to perceive and process movement, both of one's own body and of other objects. Movement of the body in space is assessed by combinations of proprioceptive input (sensory fibres in the muscles and limbs communicate information regarding their position in space on a continuous basis), visual input (proprioception is confirmed by our visual registry of where our limbs

and external objects are) and vestibular input concerning balance and orientation.[10] This information provides a detailed and highly accurate sense of where the body is and what it is doing at all times. The motion of objects and other beings is processed by multiple mechanisms within the optic and accessory optic pathways in the brain and is facilitated by two specific adaptations of the human visual system: optic flow and ocular pursuit. The principle of optic flow counteracts the distortion of the retinal image as the body moves through space.[11] As the head and eyes move the retinal image is subjected to a certain degree of turbulence that is not perceived by the individual because of a neural response that allows for the gauging of velocity vectors between point of origin and point of destination. In other words, the brain uses proprioceptive information to judge its own velocity and factors into the visual field the organic equivalent of a digital camera's image stabilisation. This also enables us to see a continuous, steady image when we pan our eyes to the left or right, even though human eyes move in a series of saccades and fixations. Ocular pursuit is a resultant property of the fovea that allows moderate and continuous movements to be tracked, even if those movements are interrupted in the visual field.[12] If an object moves across the visual field, an animal with a fovea – some fish, birds, reptiles, but amongst mammals only the simian primates posses a fovea – that animal will be able to track the movement and accurately predict its continued trajectory if the object passes behind an obstacle.

When we move, a series of motor neurons are activated that stimulate and control the various muscles and tendons involved in performing an action. Reaching out to grasp a cup of water will produce a neural motor pattern that governs everything from preparing to move the arm to counteracting the force of gravity with the correct upward force to lift the cup without spilling its contents. There is evidence that demonstrates that when a person thinks about performing an action, the same neural motor pattern is produced in the brain even though no action is actually

[10] The intricacies and importance of the vestibular system will be explored in more detail in the following chapter.
[11] Alain Berthoz, *The Brain's Sense of Movement*, trans. by Giselle Weiss (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 60.
[12] Berthoz, p. 62.

taken.[13] The neurons that simulate these 'actions' are commonly termed mirror neurons and they can activate in a variety of situations, including: when one thinks about performing an action; when one watches someone else perform an action; and when one hears action words such as 'kick' or 'stand'. It seems that 'humans […] internally simulate the action which' is thought of, or even read out to them, in a way that incorporates the bodily experience of our own movement.[14] The human visual system, then, has a certain propensity towards movement and is organised around the detection, analysis and prediction of it in a way that mirrors the primacy of motion in our everyday lives, thus defining it as a distinctly vital component in the gathering of information. The lack of motion inherent within the mechanical eye of the camera in *Gut*, therefore, creates a problematic tension. If 'the body […] forms our primal perspective or mode of engagement with the world' then the most natural mode of interacting with the world, real or fictive, would entail re-enacting those modes of embodied interaction.[15] The human brain functions most generally 'as a hypothesis generating machine', taking in sensory information and proposing coherent scenarios of objects and events: in order to perform this function, it seeks out sensory information through moving its parts – its limbs, head, and eyes – and its self through the world around it.[16]

Our eyes and our bodies were made to move. Being trapped within the look that does not move creates a disquieting, expectant tension. As if the stasis of the camera were being placated, the deep focused close-up shots that characterise *Gut* induce a kind of paradoxical visual frenzy that encourages furtive investigation of what *is* seen even as the look is disempowered and 'locked down'. The human sensory system is an interconnected network of detectors that continually and

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[13] Olaf Hauk and colleagues explored the neuronal representation of action words ('lick', 'kick', 'pick') during a passive reading task and discovered that some of the same motoric nerves involved in performing the action are also utilised in the metaphorical representation of that word. Similarly, Evelyne Kohler et al. investigated the mental representation of objects and actions through associated sounds, again finding that some of the same neurons involved in the experience of the object were also utilised in the comprehension of the associated sound. Olaf Hauk, Ingrid Johnsrude and Friedmann Pulvermuller, 'Somatotopic Representation of Action Words in Human Motor and Premotor Cortex', *Neuron*, 41 (2004), 301-7; Evelyne Kohler, et al., 'Hearing Sounds, Understanding Actions: Action Representation In Mirror Neurons', *Science*, 297 (2002), 846-48.

[14] Christina Jung and Peggy Sparenberg, 'Cognitive Perspectives on Embodiment', in *Body Memory, Metaphor and Movement*, ed. by Sabine C. Koch, Thomas Fuchs, Michela Summa and Cornelia Muller (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2012), pp. 141-154 (p. 141-2).

[15] Richard Shusterman, *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 2.

[16] C. U. M. Smith, *Biology of Sensory Systems* (Chichester: Wiley, 2000), p. 402.

consistently cross-matches each of its individual perceptions, compares them to previous physiological and psychosocial experience and generates a coherent scenario of *what is most likely to be happening*. For example, if a large portion of the visual field moves, the brain will most often assume that the individual has moved and the world has stayed stationary, creating a momentary sensory discomfort as the individual seems to feel him or herself in motion. Consulting the vestibular system, however, confirms that the individual is stationary and the illusion is broken within seconds. When one sense is disabled, or providing information that is discontinuous with our previous knowledge or experience, the brain turns to other senses to assist in ascertaining the coherence of a particular event. The static camera of *Gut* sequentially reinforces the cinematic frame, marooning vision in a frustratingly limited position that, by its inadequacy and the inherent desire to want to follow the movement of characters and objects off screen, actually offers a way to break that frame by heightening engagement with other not so explicitly framed senses. As the viewer stares back at Dan's face the inability to associate that with the concomitant reverse-shot produces a visual fascination with what the viewer *can* see: the odd angle of Dan's glasses, the contrast between his pale skin and dark features, the slight sheen of sweat on his forehead, the slight downturn of his eyes that is mimicked by the shape of his pursed lips, the glint of light reflected upon his glasses, eyes, lips and skin all reinforce a kind of textural exploration of a single image. The viewer disengages from the narrative in order to explore the oscillating contours of a single frame among the flow of many.

Linda Williams' subtitle – the frenzy of the visible – is invoked very consciously here for its association with both fascination and pornography. It would be remiss not to note the pornographic qualities of *Gut*: the vaginal imagery of the wound, the penetration of the wound by the male hand, the fascinated voyeurism of Tom and Dan, and the blue tint that suffuses their acts of spectatorship. It would also be neglectful to ignore horror's on-going dalliance with pornography – from Michael Findlay's *Snuff* (1976) and the literal conflation of sex and death, to its contemporary counterpart in Srdjan Spasojevic's *A Serbian Film* (2010) – which often results in 'a perverse displacement of pornographic hard-core sexual activities, which typically

end in penetration, onto the penetrating violation of the body's very flesh'.[17] The sexual organs 'become' the body as the conventions of horror and porn comingle and pollute the semantic stability of the image. Horror's version of the pornographic often *begins* with penetration, of course, as the weapon of choice slashes and hacks its way through the vulnerable flesh of the victim to reduce the body to a symbol of the sexual organs. The epitome of the complete conflation of the sexual organs and the wound is the act of intercourse with/through the wound (Andy Warhol's *Frankenstein* (1974), *Crash* (1996), *Deadgirl* (2008)) that openly exchanges one for the other, confusing the bodily acts and sensations of sex and death in the extreme. This confusion is enabled partly because the symbolic system that organises the various body parts and orifices becomes confused within the narrative – in *Crash*, for example, the psychological trauma of physical injury leads to a perverse fixation upon the wound as a sexual object and a means to ratify one's material existence – but partly because 'correct' orifices and 'incorrect' wounds share a common function: they open the fortress of the human body. The opening of the body exposes the vulnerable interior and ties the experiencing subject to their most material form through undeniably organic processes and sensations – eating, excreting, sex, birth, death – that act as the gateway to a sensorial pleasure/pain continuum.[18] The figurative, and sometimes literal, 'replacement of orgasm's 'little death' by real death' is possible because the resultant sensations are of the same order – death arguably, and paradoxically, requires the same moment of surrender to the viscerally organic that orgasm does as physiological control is relinquished permanently (death) or temporarily (orgasm). They are both primarily and fundamentally *of the body* and this is why horror and pornography resonate with one another so explicitly.[19]

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[17] Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure and the Frenzy of the Visible* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. 192.

[18] A continuum not because they are directly related, as the adage 'pain is close to pleasure' may suggest, but because the tangible qualities are phenomenally similar: visceral, subconscious, precognitive, primal.

[19] The united front of sex and death in the horror film is not unique to this contemporary turn of embodied, extreme horror. From Mark Lewis' murder of prostitutes and supply of pornographic material to a local adult outlet in Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* (1960) and Norman Bates' sexual desires in *Psycho* (1960), to the low-budget *Snuff* (1976), the sexually charged slasher-cycle of the 1980s analysed by Carol Clover in *Men, Women and Chain Saws*, and rape-revenge titles including Meir Zarchi's *I Spit on Your Grave* (1978), recently remade by director Steven R. Munroe – the union between the two body genres perseveres and, perhaps more importantly, sells. What is crucial for this investigation of extreme horror is the way in which the sex-death combination opens the body – both onscreen and off – to sensorial stimulation in an increasingly effective and reliable manner. Mingling horror and pornography provides a shortcut to generating visceral affect in the viewer.

This resonance is, however, a complex biopsychosocial mechanism that is somewhat ahead of the argument at this juncture. The salient point is this: the material existence and experience of the human body can enable seemingly disparate concepts such as sex and death to be so entangled with one another that, on occasion, contemporary cinema cannot separate the two. Horror's incestuous relationship with pornography, then, retraces the genre's troubled communion with the body and problematizes the emotional effects of extreme horror. Horror/pornography exemplifies the attraction/repulsion dialectic of Julia Kristeva's abject: it excites and horrifies, horrifies *because* it excites (in a physiological sense it causes an increase in energy or activity without that rise being explicitly coded as positive or immediately sexual). The marriage of sex and violence in contemporary horror acts as a magnifying conduit, uniting highly emotive and distinctly embodied fields of knowledge and understanding in order to excavate a visceral avenue of affect that extends from the film onscreen to the very heart of the viewing individual.

This kind of cinematic control, that directs the viewer through one level of psychosocial engagement to another level of physiological engagement, is a subtle manifestation not only of the enduring anxiety pertaining to sexuality and certain sexual practices but also of the perceived influence of the media. Reflected in the on-going campaigns by Mediawatch-UK (formerly the National Viewers and Listeners Association) against 'content which is potentially harmful' and the association between media representations and violent crime noted in the previous chapter, the link between violent images and violent acts is theoretically tenuous but

Figure 1.4: *Videodrome* (1983, top) and *Gut* (2012, bottom)

arduously enduring.[20] The imagery of the clip in *Gut* with its prone, helpless body and vertical incision recalls David Cronenberg's *Videodrome* (1983; Figure 1.4, above) as protagonist Max Renn is slowly corrupted by another form of mediated looking, a broadcast television signal. As the Videodrome's influence over Renn's psychology grows and he begins to hallucinate, a vertical wound opens in his stomach. Videotapes are inserted into the wound and are then 'played' into Max's mind, controlling his thoughts and influencing his actions. Although the role of the mediated image, represented by television and video in *Videodrome*, is less heavy-handed in *Gut* the parallel remains: Tom and Dan are, like Max Renn, so fascinated by the violence onscreen that they find themselves willingly transgressing the boundaries of good taste in watching what appears to be snuff footage.

Both *Videodrome* and *Gut* use the mechanisms of looking to explore the ability of media technologies to create ambiguous images in a manifestation of the 'long-standing struggle with the role of the media in modern societies'.[21] Chuck Tryon notes that the cycle of found-footage horror at the turn of the twenty-first century juxtaposes various visual or surveillance technologies with horrific imagery in order to suggest 'that electronic media will lead to fragmented social relationships because of their illusion of authenticity and their potential to further isolate people from a larger community'.[22] An extension of a capitalist critique of the media, this view draws upon the function of representation as one that distances the viewer from the objects that are represented onscreen. The image of a naked female body projected through the media is not only representative of a naked female body, but also of the gender dynamics that Mulvey identifies in the cinematic apparatus; it speaks of the organic but it also speaks of the psychosocial significance of that image. Mediatised images are never simply representative of what they portray but also encode a type of illusion whereby the image of a body comes to be more significant than the body itself. As was noted in the introduction, there is 'an unlimited display of physicality in

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[20] Mediawatch-UK, *Home Page* (2013) < http://www.mediawatchuk.com>, [accessed 20 August 2014] (para. 1 of 3).
[21] Lajos Császi, 'Towards a Cultural Framework of Audience Response and Television Violence', *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, 10 (2008), <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol10/iss3/2>, [accessed 25 October 2011] (p. 2).
[22] Chuck Tryon, 'Video From The Void: Video Spectatorship, Domestic Film Cultures, and Contemporary Horror Film', *Journal of Film and Video*, 3rd ser., 61 (2009), pp. 40-51 (p. 40).

mass culture' yet the body that surrounds us is not a body *per se* but an image of a body.[23]

In *Videodrome*, Renn's body is controlled by the Videodrome signal in the same way that the media companies construct and control the omnipresent image of the body in contemporary culture. When *Videodrome's* Brian O'Blivion explains to Renn that 'there is nothing real outside our perception of reality', there is an implication that this perception is, perhaps, generated by the media and given to the individual as 'reality'. Certainly, the Videodrome became Max Renn's reality as he is driven to first murder and then suicide by the controlling technology. In *Gut*, however, the primacy of the mediated image of the body and the assumption that it is an image untethered to organic reality is problematized.

The mode of viewing created by the film is principally embodied with both Tom and Dan having a connotatively sexual reaction to the footage. That reaction is disturbed, however, when the perceived safety of the anonymous image – the assumption that it is unreal, staged, or part of a work of fiction – disintegrates as the victims become identified as 'real' bodies. The only time the camera pans in *Gut* is to reveal that victim three is Sally, Dan's girlfriend. This single, quick movement as the camera moves up to Sally's face and then back to her stomach offers the viewer the visual freedom that had previously been denied by the insistently stationary camera only to counter that freedom with the implication of complicity in the act. The mediated image is no longer representative or symbolic, it is no longer an image but an actual body. Moreover, the viewer (Dan) is identified as both the intended recipient and a causal factor in the creation of the footage. The representation system of the cinema fades and the sanctity of viewership is questioned in a purposely-confused moral dilemma that teeters on the borders of the body/image.

In using technology in this manner, however, films also foreground their own inherent bias as they both 'enframe and reveal' the image presented and the method of technological presentation.[24] In Deodato's commentary on savagery, the deceptive

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[23] Marzena Kubisz, *Strategies of Resistance* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2003), p. 8.
[24] Joost Van Loon, 'Enframing/Revealing', in *Ethics and Media Culture*, ed. by David Berry (Oxford: Focal Press, 2005), pp. 54-72 (p. 57).

nature of 'news' reporting is outlined by the revelation that hard-hitting footage of an event was entirely staged – a process that is then reinforced by the mock-documentary style of the film. The commentary upon the media becomes reflexive, projected towards the extra-diegetic viewer as the inter-diegetic ones are annihilated by the ambiguities of technological influence and control.[25] *Cannibal Holocaust, Videodrome* and *Gut* provide representations of the act of representation, which serves to question the authenticity of the media involved. We are looking now at looking and more specifically at how looking can never take place in isolation from the richness of human experience. Mechanical representation, like human vision, is subjectively constructed – in other words, the camera *always* lies, vision is *always* from a specified perspective – and it is this subjectivity that opens the mediatised image to exploration in the same way that the human body is literally opened in the horror film. The opening of the body onscreen performs a cinematic sleight-of-hand that takes the image into the symbolic (for the extremity of such violence can only be an illusion in a representative medium that perpetually presents unreality as reality) and simultaneously, through its very visceral subject matter, into the realm of organic corporeality. The significance of the image of the body – the fact that it is inscribed with multiple structures of meaning through its indelible relevance to both our existence and our society – returns the viewer to their own insidious (at least in the current context) *organicity* as the viewer's eye 'move[s] over the surface of [the image] rather than [plunging] into illusionistic depth'.[26] As the body onscreen is opened, augmented, dismembered, violated and murdered, the body watching is similarly opened, stimulated, manipulated and affected as optical modes of looking for meaning elide with a haptic mode of viewing.

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[25] This critique of technology and the mechanics of its misleading vision echo the development of the understanding of human vision as subjective, situated and biased that Jonathan Crary explores in *Techniques of the Observer*. At the outset of scientific endeavour vision was conceptualised as an exterior process that simply represented an objective truth to the seer. As physiological understanding has developed, however, vision has become internalised and individualised within the body to become a process that represents those facets of the environment that are of highest biological and cultural importance to the person who sees.

[26] Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), p. 162.

The Haptic Mode of Looking

The type of looking that is encouraged by these highly detailed but fragmentary images of opened bodies is a mode termed the *haptic* by critics including Vivian Sobchack and Laura U. Marks. Of this mode, Marks writes that

> certain images appeal to a haptic, or tactile, visuality. Haptic images, I suggest, invite the viewer to respond to the image in an intimate, embodied way, and thus facilitate the experience of other sensory impressions as well. These sense experiences are not separate, of course […] they inform each person's sensorium, the bodily organization of sense experience.[27]

To look at an image or film frame in the haptic mode is to attend to the fine textural detail of the image as in a field of vision. It is a process that occurs before meaning-making has been completed and, as will be argued below, it forms an integral part of the meaning that is subsequently constructed. To take a haptic look at an image is to allow the eye to see what is put before it without imposing interpretations or symbolisations onto the objects and events seen. It is, however, a mode of looking facilitated in horror by an immediate and visceral recognition of significance within an image – a significance structured by organic experience. This bodily experience and understanding is not so much outside of social or cultural determinants as it is beneath them. The haptic is a different, perhaps more primal, certainly more phenomenally immediate mode of viewing that gives access to the experiences that need to be socially and culturally coded in order for coherence to be made of them.

A tacit assumption of this mode of seeing is that the body, and specifically the eye, is not an isolated organic unit that operates under the direction, or on behalf of, the conscious individual but is the very mode of being and experiencing itself. The problematic mind-body split that traditionally privileges consciousness over physicality is redressed within a theory of haptic vision. Maurice Merleau-Ponty's claim that 'through the phenomenal body we are in a constant relationship with an environment into which that body is projected' approaches the mind-body distinction

[27] Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, p. 2.

but fails to nullify the inherent opposition of the two terms.[28] It is not 'through' the body that 'we' contact the world but rather, the body is a composite part of 'us' as we are in the world. Phenomenologically, and particularly for haptic visuality, the mind can be conceptualised as an expression of the physiological existence and experience of the individual such that consciousness, as we understand it, arises as a by-product of the neurological and physiological structures of the human body, and particularly the central nervous system. This fledgling consciousness, in constant contact with the physical and psychosocial world in which it exists, is then physiologically and socially influenced. It is this embodied experience that underpins our conscious perception of our selves and the world. Body horror and extreme film are able to access the body of the viewer through the coherent simulation of bodily sensation in the haptic mode of looking accessed through the subject matter of the narrative.

Marks' theory of the haptic, set out in *The Skin of the Film*, posits two different but interconnected angles of approach. In her borrowing of the term from Aloïs Riegl, Marks acknowledges both a *haptic image* and a *haptic visuality*. Haptic images, following Riegl's definition, are associated with a visual sharpness that invites the experience of touch into the detailed textures of the visual field.[29] The consistent use of deep focus in *Gut* allows such haptic images to be offered to the viewer. Textural details of fabric and skin are visible, colour tints emphasise shape and form and repeated images of fetishised gazing mimetically encourage a higher level of visual scrutiny from the viewer. The visual textures of the elements within the frame seem to emerge from the image and invite the viewer's attention in a way that leads into the sensorial scrutiny of individual details rather than an assessment of narrative context. Haptic visuality, however, refers to a viewer's willingness to engage in the type of looking that these images offer. It is possible, for example, to look at what Marks would define as a haptic image with a more traditional cinematic gaze. The eviscerated female torso being penetrated by the male hand can be viewed in its totality as a representation of the psychodynamics of gender hierarchy. The deep focus that creates the sustained detail of the shots can be seen as a mechanism for promoting spectacle, for dehumanizing the female torso and encouraging the

[28] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith (Henley: The Humanities Press, 1962), p. 396.
[29] Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, p. 162.

masterful male gaze. The restraint of the female, the objectification of her body, the power of the male (reflexively reinforced in Mulvey's model of spectatorship through the apparatus itself), and the ritualised penetration of the female body can be read as signifiers of a deep social conflict between male and female that returns us to early psychoanalytic film readings. The return of the repressed – female sexuality iconised by the curvaceous midriff, stylised artificial vagina and the final act of violence against the mother and her daughter – and the mastering of that repressed entity through its annihilation can easily and perhaps productively be uncovered here in *Gut*'s narrative and iconography.

Such a reading, however, suggests that the viewer not only automatically senses and perceives both what is shown in the image and what that image means but that this social context is the primary force that drives interpretation. It is the social significance of the bodies as *male* and *female* – distinct social categories irrefutably bound with the history of modern society and the hierarchies and struggles they contain – that dictates the route of interpretation and directs the viewer to seek coherences based upon the schemata associated with gender categories. These schemata, webs of connotations that have been woven together through generations of sociocultural history and experience, are not necessarily ontologically linked to the material origin of the social categories; they are not principally embodied. Indeed, Mulvey's theory of spectatorship assigns the labels 'male' and 'female' to viewing positions, largely irrespective of the actual gender of the individual occupying them. Similarly, Carol Clover's exploration of character roles and identification mechanisms in the slasher film proposed that gender itself was not clearly demarcated and that 'male' and 'female' often elided with one another and oscillated disturbingly through the intimacy between slasher villain and the Final Girl. There is no attempt here to deny the validity or political drive of this type of critical framework, it is simply being noted that although the language purports to speak of the body, the critical application routinely departs from the organic in favour of the psychosocial. Beneath the very concepts of gender, however, lie structures of embodied understanding that guide and influence interpretation.

Haptic images resist the cultural predisposition to overlook embodied experience in favour of social signification by separating the process of sensing – a

physiological one – from the process of perceiving – a psychosocial one. By drawing attention to the very form of the image – to its colours, lines, shapes, to the textures, both expected and unexpected, to the way things move and to the grain of the film medium – the viewer is invited to allow the eye to wander. This invitation is not prescriptive: there is not a single avenue of exploration but many, threading themselves over the surface of the image to create a sensorial tapestry of the viewing experience. By drawing attention to this alternative mode of viewing the 'representational power of the image' is diminished as haptic visuality 'privileges the material presence of the image' itself.[30] The emphasis is resituated from what the film represents to the experiences it can present to the viewer. The haptic image invites the viewer to approach it not as a pre-constituted unity to be deciphered but as a re-creation of the visual experience of everyday life. The form of the image takes precedence as a structural component of the content of that image. In this re-creation the viewer must integrate their various sensory perceptions in order to construct coherence and ultimately create meaning from and within the haptic image. While the haptic image adopts visual clarity to invite the sense of touch into the experience of vision, haptic visuality can be equally encouraged by a lack of visual acuity that inhibits the ability to interpret the image within a narrative context. The found footage subgenre is particularly adept at manipulating this lack of visual precedence in order to stimulate alternative sensory modalities. Whilst *Gut* subverted the aesthetic expectations of found footage by restricting camera movement, *The Poughkeepsie Tapes* (2007) combines visual-vestibular distortion in association with video decay effects to generate an anti-Hollywood, mock-documentary style narrative that formally undermines the power of the coherent visual image.

The Poughkeepsie Tapes (2007), along with other contributions to the found-footage subgenre including *V/H/S* (2012) and *Sinister* (2012), continues the tradition of adopting poor quality video recording in order to both enhance the viewing experience and question the role of technology in the display of violent imagery. As Xavier Aldana Reyes argues, the focus upon mediated images in *The Poughkeepsie Tapes*, together with its 'unreleased' status, explores the anxieties around 'the possible misuses of new and more immediate systems of image recording and file

[30] Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, p. 163.

sharing' that ultimately mediates the depiction of violence and its subsequent consumption.[31] Although *The Poughkeepsie Tapes* had a small theatrical opening in America, it has subsequently only been accessible through online file sharing networks and video platforms like Vimeo and YouTube. These video files, however, regularly disappear and reappear on different platforms. The cultural mythology of the film is built upon this notion of ephemerality as it stands on the border of fiction and documentary, thus continually questioning its own acts of representation. I would like to supplement Reyes's claim by proposing that this questioning is largely facilitated by the medium's propensity to prevent the viewer from relying exclusively upon vision to discern the events of the narrative. It is not only 'the act of viewing' that *The Poughkeepsie Tapes* questions but the legitimacy of the act of viewing in a technologically multisensory culture.

The Poughkeepsie Tapes presents a documentary style recording that makes use of video footage discovered in the house of an alleged serial murderer. Both the documentary footage and the discovered tapes are of low resolution with many sequences fading, distorting and physically degrading as the viewer watches.[32] Typically, and in contrast to *Gut*, the images are grainy and out of focus. In addition to this the colours often distort so that the contrast between certain objects and features is disrupted or elided completely. Figure 1.5, below, shows the kind of colour shift that is present throughout scenes and the film as a whole. In this example a victim is drugged with chloroform in front of the handheld camera that records the killer's acts. The camera is stationary as the victim's head moves from side to side.

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[31] Xavier Aldana Reyes, 'Violence and Mediation: The Ethics of Spectatorship in Twenty-First Century Horror Film', in *Violence and the Limits of Representation*, ed. by Graham Matthews and Sam Goodman (London: Palgrave, 2013), pp. 145-159 (p. 146); (p. 156). *The Poughkeepsie Tapes* has received surprisingly little critical attention, getting only a notational mention in Alexandra Heller-Nicholas' *Found Footage Horror Films* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2013) monograph, perhaps owing to its low budget and lack of commercial success. Irrespective of its commercial standing, the film is notable for its peculiarly disturbing style and the way in which it elides the primacy of vision through the systematic destruction of that sense.

[32] Video decay is an effect commonly used in this particular subgenre in an attempt to increase the authenticity of the 'discovered' footage. Scott Derrickson's *Sinister* (2012), for example, uses the melting of 8mm videotape to suggest an increased age to the discovered footage in that narrative. It is also a technique that has been employed in music video. The White Zombie track *More Human Than Human* features a video structurally similar to *The Poughkeepsie Tapes*: two streams of footage are interlaced, with one being representative of old home videos. This stream is artificially aged in a way that, like the intermittent and discontinuous clips of *Poughkeepsie*, evokes the authenticity and validity of represented images.

The image continuously breaks down into static and returns with a different colour scheme without a conventional cut or editing technique being immediately evident.

Figure 1.5: Colour Alterations in *The Poughkeepsie Tapes*

While this kind of visual instability does contribute to the sense of authenticity that the mock documentary film is attempting to build, it also renders it increasingly difficult for the viewer to engage with the represented events in a psychologically meaningful manner. The structure of the film interpolates two streams of footage: the first is a documentary that is more visually consistent, and the second is the found footage of the killer's acts. The alternating of these two streams necessarily fragments the narrative as the reservoir of found footage clips is shown out of sequence and out of context. As such, each clip appears isolated in the run of the film and there is little opportunity for the narrative to build tension or momentum. The effect of such structuring is distinctive in that the display of the supposed found footage appears as a type of fascinated looking as the documentary makers and police watch the tapes and attempt to piece together the events and actions they depict. This in turn encourages the viewer to look from one aspect of the image to the next, appreciating each in isolation, without comprehending the totality of those elements or the potential significance of them.

The fascinated look is manifest in *Gut* and *The Poughkeepsie Tapes* through the repeated focus upon the gaze of characters within the films. In *Gut* the face is most often shown in a state of ambiguous arousal as the protagonist fixedly stares at the screen, lips pursed and sweating lightly. In *The Poughkeepsie Tapes* the faces of victims are typically distorted by the home video aesthetic. Figure 1.6, below, shows two parts of a lingering zoom that refocuses the image from the full body of the victim to her fearful face.

Figure 1.6: Visual Distortion of the Close-up, *The Poughkeepsie Tapes*

Just prior to the zoom commencing the grainy, monochrome scheme of the image is replaced with the distressed, multi-coloured overlay of degrading film. The curtain that hangs behind the victim becomes pixelated and distorted by the green and yellow hues that seem to wash over it and the woman's body. The image is given a sense of movement by the repeated weaving of the lines in the background that appeals to the viewer's sense of their own bodily movement and balance as the film appears to be threatening to degrade before their eyes. The coarseness of the colour transitions and the graininess of the image appeal to the viewer's experience of texture as the film seems to be fragmenting and breaking apart, its tears evident in the abrupt lines and harsh, almost dazzling contrast. As the camera zooms closer the contrast of the image appears to increase so that the boundaries of the woman's face disappear into whiteness and become tinted with purple hues that hint at the violence she may shortly be suffering. Whereas *Gut* invokes texture within the image, *The Poughkeepsie Tapes* invokes texture *upon* the image by using visual technologies to replicate the same kind of granularity associated with touch. The image fluctuates throughout *The Poughkeepsie Tapes* between alternate modes of visuality: between the authenticity of the documentary style footage and the sensorial quality of the found footage. The narrative emerges in fits and starts as pieces of linear coherence are interspersed with sensory incoherence and interruption. The two modes of viewing are effectively layered – narrative coherence, available to consciousness through a complex web of psychosocial connotations, sits atop a roiling sea of almost-overwhelming sensory experience – as haptic knowledge is enmeshed with psychosocial engagement. As the camera begins to zoom in on the woman's fearful face and the image begins to distort a juncture is created – a point of contact between the modes of looking that allows the viewer to move between the two, to disengage from the attempt to create narrative coherence and become preoccupied with the sensory quality of the image. This splitting of the image into its optical and haptic

facets creates a moment of sensory exchange as elements of tactile texture are offered to the eye in a way that integrates the two modalities. Touch and vision mingle and allow the viewer to explore the image through this dual-modality. The repetition of these junctures throughout the film encourages an oscillating movement between the layers of the image and modes of looking that facilitates cross-modal exchanges between the senses.

The Poughkeepsie Tapes is not an anti-narrative film, or an abstract art performance; it is a film that weaves its narrative from and through the bodily sensation of its viewer in an effort to communicate the bodily sensation of its victims. When Reyes notes that *The Poughkeepsie Tapes* was 'criticized for the uneasy complicity [the film] establishes between documentary and spectator' and that the 'audience are rendered complicit with the enjoyment taken from representations of cruelty and violence', it is by virtue of the intermittent appeals to cross-modal bodily sensation.[33] These moments of sensory experience break the involved engagement with the narrative that would render the acts horrific. The horror genre is *the* cinematic genre of bodily sensations, of representing and creating them, and these two processes are intimately connected. In order to effectively represent bodily sensation, the film must use both its form and content to *present* bodily sensation. Advancing prostheses, computer generated images and special effects have greatly increased the quality of staged effects in the content of horror films (note the differences between *Videodrome* and *Gut*'s similar imagery in Figure 1.4; while Max Renn's stomach wound looks artificial, the wound in the female victim's stomach is not so obviously staged), and the content remains of utmost importance to the genre. The need for an embodied viewing experience is propelled precisely by the extreme content of the images: how else can one display the evisceration and penetration of a female torso without the image inciting psychosexual pastiche unless the delivery of that image is fundamentally embodied, thus ensuring that the reaction, inter- and extra-diegetically, is visceral?

The resulting movement between narrative and sensory experience, content and form, gives the impression of attention shifting as the viewer navigates from one

[33] Reyes, p. 158.

level of viewing to the other. Techniques that encourage this type of short-attention sensory movement could be considered as 'showy exercises in technique and style' that use formal play without it necessarily enhancing the interpretation of the visual fiction.[34] The so-called 'MTV aesthetic', as Marco Calavita discusses, refers to the perceived tendency of films since the 1980s 'to privilege gloss, atmospherics, and camerawork', which are often 'clearly meant to be noticed and appreciated on their own burnished terms'.[35] In addition, the increased pace of the film is often also aligned with the music video, whose purpose it is to communicate a miniature narrative within three or four minutes. Films that display the MTV aesthetic – a title whose legitimacy Calavita disputes – incorporate 'manic editing that often features flash-cuts, jump-cuts, and the stirring together of varied film stocks, colours, and speeds'.[36] While *The Poughkeepsie Tapes* certainly does make use of inventive editing techniques and gives the impression of using mixed stock in order to differentiate the threads of its narrative, it does not present its formal qualities over and above its content. Like Deodato's early found footage film, the stylistic qualities of *The Poughkeepsie Tapes* serve to enhance its narrative content and not to detract from it. Therein lies the distinction that the pejorative label renders almost impossible to make; it is entirely plausible that a film may exhibit a bravura style that adds something to the viewing experience.

The Poughkeepsie Tapes appears to be an occularcentric film that focuses relentlessly upon the construction, mediation and presentation of the image. All acts of violence are mediated on three diegetic levels – the discovered tapes, the constructed documentary and the cinematic film – resulting in the same type of optical amplification found in Norman Bates' scene of voyeurism in *Psycho*. The uneven nature of the editing, at times matched and smooth while at others crosscut and frantic, both foregrounds the image whilst beginning a systematic devolution of its own optical exceptionalism. The consistent low resolution exposes the pixels that intimate the electronic and sociocultural machinery that produces and propagates the mediated image. The switches between continuous shots and the decontextualised, isolated vignettes of the recovered footage within the context of a documentary (that

[34] Marco Calavita, 'MTV Aesthetics at the Movies: Interrogating a Film Criticism Fallacy', *Journal of Film and Video*, 3rd ser., 59 (2007), 15-31 (p. 16).
[35] Calavita, p. 16.
[36] Calavita, p. 16.

the viewer nevertheless understands as a film) enact a continuous transition between the categories of documentary, news and film. The visual excess of *The Poughkeepsie Tapes* – its compilation of a video aesthetic, decay effects, uneven editing and hand-held technique – leads to sensorial exchange and overload. Laura U. Marks identifies 'the possibilities of electronic and digital manipulation, and video decay' as potential sources of haptic visuality in the digital image.[37] The consistent foregrounding of those optical manipulations in *The Poughkeepsie Tapes* thus enables a devolution of vision into its sensorial constituents. The optical field is awash with details – some pertinent, others not so – and the viewer is faced with a sensory dilemma: continue to attempt to find coherences between the representation of events onscreen (that is, by its very form, inhibiting its own act of representation) against the tide of accumulating stimuli, or find an alternative method of establishing coherence. One such method encouraged by the granular nature of *The Poughkeepsie Tapes*' images is sensory exploration. Instead of focusing upon the changes in represented events, the formal changes in colour, texture, balance, orientation, and lighting seep through to the surface of the image and encourage textural wandering between the senses. Through the very mechanics of its representation the haptic image 'relies not on the viewer's ability to identify signs, but on a dispersion of the viewer's look across the surface of the image': a dispersion that is enabled by the destabilisation of the primacy of vision.[38]

The effectiveness of *The Poughkeepsie Tapes* lies in the fragmentary, multisensory nature of its delivery and the experience a viewer has when watching the film through their Internet-connected device. This kind of sensorial eclecticism may be categorised under the remit of an 'MTV aesthetic'. This aesthetic is often 'attacked for its high-speed, music-oriented editing, its superficial lack of in-depth narrative drive and its inability to offer a satisfactory level of spectatorial contemplation', but this contemplation is implicitly constructed as psychosocial engagement with a narrative.[39] The visual fragmentation of the image in *The Poughkeepsie Tapes* and its continual lack of focus mimic the ungainly and mysterious origins of the film itself,

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[37] Laura U. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. 9.
[38] Marks, *Touch*, p. 20.
[39] Lara Thompson, 'In Praise of Speed: The Value of Velocity in Contemporary Cinema', *Dandelion*, 2 (2011), <http://dandelionjournal.org/index.php/dandelion/article/view/35/84>, [accessed 16 June 2014] (para. 2 of 24).

and they also encourage a different type of *sensorial* contemplation that interrupts, but does not entirely overrun, the experience of re-creating the narrative. Both the form and the content combine to encourage the viewer to engage in sensorial prying, as the texture of the film becomes labyrinthine. Vision thus becomes a conduit through which to access the wider sensorium as its isolated immediacy is revealed – by its own hand – to be misguided and myopic.

I would suggest that the cinematic style branded as the 'MTV aesthetic' is less concerned with the trappings of emulating music video in terms of brevity of editing and spectacular effects and more focused upon the phenomenological fusion of multi-sensorial experience. It has been noted that the fusion of vision and the haptic sense of touch in *The Poughkeepsie Tapes* is enacted by a type of sensorial exchange in which the digital image striates and offers tactility to vision. In a similar cross-modal borrowing, Carol Vernallis claims that music video attempts 'to match a song's shape, texture, and flow […] by approximating the experiential qualities of sound'.[40] What Vernallis is describing is a cross-modal malleability that emerges when vision and sound come together, not merely as complementary but as a synthesis of one another. As the violin tremolo instigated a sexual overtone to the singular shot of Norman Bates' eye in *Psycho*, the music video aims to extend its signification through the unification of two sensory modalities. The fusion between the optic and the auditory is, of course, greatly significant to film but the phenomenal synthesis between the two modalities is perhaps more delicate than it first seems. In the words of Walter Ong, 'sight isolates, sound incorporates': the modalities of sight and sound are noticeably different in the manner of sensation and the transmutation of those senses to perceptions.[41] Nevertheless, as vision can allow sensorial access to the haptic sense of touch, the merging of sight and sound can similarly invoke a type of audio-visual malleability.

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[40] Carol Vernallis, *Experiencing Music Video, Aesthetics and Cultural Context* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 175.
[41] Quoted in Vernallis, p. 175.

Audio-visual Malleability

It was noted in the introduction to this thesis that the anatomy of the visual system plays a developmental role in the establishment of the *body as a container* body schema. The isolation of visual acuity on the fovea, and the movement of the eyeball reinforce the notion that objects in the environment (including ourselves) are discontinuous with that environment. Hearing, however, is a continuous process of translating vibrations in the apparatus of the ear into what we perceive as sound. As Michel Chion notes, hearing is more sensitive than vision, but it is also more fluid.[42] Whilst vision hinges upon the ability to segregate and classify, the auditory sense focuses upon the continuity between individual vibrations and elements of sound. Music is a very specific type of sound that relies upon the relationship between the constituent parts of the whole. The melodies of music emerge not only at, but also in between the notes sounded as the harmonic progressions – the intervals between notes – contribute as much to the overall impression of the piece as the individual notes themselves. As such, 'the listener is an active contributor to the perception of music, eliciting a diversity of subtle processes derived in part from […] cognitive and emotional associations, and anticipations and expectations'.[43] A collection of notes is only considered 'music' if it meets certain physiological and psychosocial conditions of progression and harmonics. Those conditions are flexible across cultures, of course, but both sound and music emerge in the spaces between auditory 'objects' – individual notes, timbres, and pitches. In order for vision to approximate the experiential qualities of sound, the isolating nature of the modality has to be modified. In *The Poughkeepsie Tapes*, vision was augmented by the technologies that enabled it as they challenged the perceived coherence of our principal sense. The segregation of the film's narrative into distinct sections – footage, documentary, film – both performs, and questions, scopic isolationism as the image becomes increasingly haptic. When an auditory dimension is added, visual disintegration is heightened as the two modalities mingle and generate cross-modal perceptions that cannot be

[42] Michel Chion, *Film: A Sound Art*, trans. by Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 265.
[43] Harvey Richard Schiffman, *Sensation and Perception: An Integrated Approach*, 5th edn (New York: Wiley, 2001), p. 376.

delineated as either visual or audible alone. As Chion notes, 'we never see the same thing when we also hear; we don't hear the same thing when we see as well'.[44]

As Norman Bates watched Marion Crane undress, the low tremolo of the violin creates what K. J. Donnelly identifies as 'a distinctive and enveloping "sound architecture" or ambience'.[45] Crucially, however, the music not only acts as a reiteration of the visual scene but also extends it. The isolation of Norman's eye and Marion's body is counteracted by the tremolo that implies both his voyeuristic pleasure and the impending threat to her life. This extension is performed through the common association of certain sounds with certain emotive situations, but it also draws upon the physiological reactions caused by specific notes, tonal combinations, pitches, and timbres. 'Perceptual and emotional musical experiences lead to changes in blood pressure, pulse rate, respiration, the psycho-galvanic reflex and other autonomic functions' indicating that music has not only a psychological but also a physical effect on the listener.[46] Of particular interest to the study of horror film are the associations of positivity, happiness or excitement with high pitches, major keys, fast tempos, tonal, and consonant chords when contrasted to the associations of negativity, sadness or passivity with low pitches, minor keys, slower tempos, atonal, and dissonant chords.[47] Such recognition and associated physical response is thought to be at least partially unconscious and innate.[48] Rather than responses to horror film music being predominantly learned it seems that viewers' reactions to music are at least in part physiologically unavoidable. Certainly, anecdotal evidence of the pervasiveness of the acoustic startle reflex caused by the shock cut-stinger combination suggests that the physiological augmentation caused by audio-visual combinations produces a marked and replicable effect. In light of the tactile

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[44] Chion, *Audio-Vision*, p. xxvi.
[45] K. J. Donnelly, *The Spectre of Sound: Music in Film and Television* (London: British Film Institute, 2005), p. 93
[46] G. Harrer and M. Harrer, 'Music, Emotion and Autonomic Function', in *Music and the Brain*, ed. by MacDonald Critchley and R. A. Henson (London: William Heinemann, 1977), pp. 202-216 (p. 202).
[47] Alf Gabrielsson and Erik Lindström, 'The Influence of Musical Structure on Emotional Expression', in *Music and Emotion*, ed. by Patrick N. Juslin and John A. Sloboda, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) pp. 223-248 (pp. 228-235); for further detail on the associations made see original article: H. Costa, P. E. R. Bitti, and L. Bonfiglioli, 'Psychological Connotations of Harmonic Musical Intervals', *Psychology of Music*, 28 (2000), 4-22.
[48] Harrer and Harrer, p. 203; Isabelle Peretz, 'Listen to the Brain: A Biological Perspective on Musical Emotion', in *Music and Emotion*, pp. 105-134 (p. 118): for a more detailed review see original article by I. Peretz, L. Gagnon and B. Bouchard, 'Music and Emotion: Perceptual Determinations, Immediacy, and Isolation After Brain Damage', *Cognition*, 68 (1998), 111-41.

dimension of vision that has emerged through analysis of the haptic images of *Gut* and *The Poughkeepsie Tapes*, and the physiological component of sound perception, the combination of visual and auditory modalities generates a number of distinct yet malleable avenues of embodied sensation that go beyond the concept of one sense merely illustrating or reiterating another.

Rob Zombie's *House of 1,000 Corpses* (2003) is a prime example of what might be casually labelled as an MTV aesthetic film. Perhaps unsurprisingly given Zombie's background as both a television producer and most famously as a heavy metal musician, his directorial debut incorporates many music video techniques including: over and under exposed frames, split-screen effects, cross and jump cuts, vignette-style 'asides' that interrupt the narrative, and combinations of graphic imagery with counter-intuitive audio tracks. The film, set in the mid 1970s, follows two couples – Bill, Jerry, Mary and Denise – as they travel across America seeking out backstreet country attractions to include in a guidebook they plan on writing. They happen across Captain Spaulding's Museum of Monsters and Madmen where they hear the legend of local killer 'Dr Satan'. On their quest to locate the fabled tree where Dr Satan was killed the couples come across a lone hitchhiker named Baby. A series of acutely unfortunate events lead the couples to Baby's family home where Mama Firefly, Grampa, Tiny Firefly, Rufus and Otis Driftwood are waiting for them. The Firefly family subject the couples to an evening of bizarre Halloween celebration culminating in graphic torture and murder. The film finishes as it began, with the legend of Dr Satan, as Denise and Jerry are lowered into an underground lair where the cybernetic doctor is eager to include them in his experiments.[49]

Throughout the opening scenes of the film, the narrative is punctuated by a series of decontextualised vignettes that display the hallmarks of the 'electronic and digital manipulation' that encourages haptic visuality (Figure 1.7).[50]

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[49] The film purportedly pays homage to 1970s exploitation cinema and the similarities to Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974) are striking. The style of the film, however, is distinct from its predecessors as it combines themes and motifs from classical, exploitation, splatter and slasher style horror films.
[50] Marks, *Touch*, p. 9.

Figure 1.7: Digitally Manipulated Vignette Scenes, *House of 1,000 Corpses* (2003)

Interspersed between the narrative, these shots of billboards, carnival attractions and people dressed in what appear to be voodoo-inspired costumes are intrusive. Physically, the bright colours of the scenes are juxtaposed to the chiaroscuro lighting throughout the rest of the film, creating a tangible jolt of increased sensation. This in turn foregrounds the fact that these scenes operate extra-diegetically: they are not implicated to be seen by the protagonists, but instead are 'additions' to the unfolding of the narrative. These additions effectively 'break' the continuity of viewing both physically and metaphorically in a way that subtly begins to invoke the haptic element of vision. The contrast between light and dark, the contours of individual shapes, and the lower resolution of these brief images draw the viewer's eye, momentarily, towards the surface of the image. This transition from optic to haptic visuality foreshadows the sensorial conversion that is later enacted by Zombie's combinations of vision, haptic tactility, and music.

Once such sensory augmentation occurs as Officers Wydell and Nash, along with concerned father Doug Willis, visit the Firefly's homestead in search of the two missing couples. The sequence of shots begins with over-exposed images of the car approaching the farm interspersed with images of body parts. The vivid colours seem to bleed into one another, connecting as-yet indistinct objects by hue and shape as blunt lines slowly begin to materialise. As the engine sound dies, the image slowly fades into a conventional film shot, temporarily restoring vision as the narrative segment begins. Nash and Willis go around to the rear yard where they find a shed. On opening the shed doors all diegetic sound stops and the images continue in slow motion as Slim Whitman's country ballad *I Remember You* dominates the auditory field. Laura Weibe Taylor suggests that 'popular song in film is often used to set a specific mood or historical time period', and goes on to claim that popular music in

Zombie's overture functions as a normalising device that draws connections between the viewer and the narrative antagonists.[51] I believe, however, that the qualities of the specific tracks chosen by Zombie, coupled with the manipulation of vision, have a more intrinsic effect.

Beginning with harmonica melodies and continuing with a consistent rhythm reflected in the steady lyrical metre, Slim Whitman's track makes use of consonant chords, major keys and a reasonably high pitch to create an emotional but upbeat song reminiscing about a lost love impressed upon the singer's memory. In contrast to the sentimentality of the musical track the silent, slow motion images expose scenes of utter horror: dead bodies strung from the rafters of the garden shed; Denise, bloodied and bruised thrashing against her bindings; Officer Wydell being shot in the temple by Mama Firefly; Doug Willis being shot in the back by Otis Driftwood with a cross-cut showing Willis' home video footage of previous Christmases; and finally, Officer Nash being held at gunpoint and forced to his knees by Otis (Figure 1.8, below).

[51] Laura Weibe Taylor, 'Popular Songs and Ordinary Violence: Exposing Basic Human Brutality in the Films of Rob Zombie', in *Terror Tracks: Music, Sound and Horror Cinema*, ed. by Philip Hayward (London: Equinox, 2009), pp. 229-237 (p. 232). Zombie's film has been analysed by Phoebe Fletcher as a post-9/11 splatter film, enacting the destruction of the American institution through the perversion of the 'ideal family' trope which raises questions about the legitimacy of the claim for historicity fashioned by Zombie's use of 1970s popular music. Phoebe Fletcher, 'Terror and Anti-Production in the Post 9/11 Splatter Film', in *The Many Forms of Fear, Horror and Terror*, ed. by Leanne Franklin and Ravanel Richardson (Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2009), pp. 81-92.

Figure 1.8: 'I Remember You' Segment, *House of 1,000 Corpses* (2003)

This scene is bracketed from the flow of narrative by the music-video style cinematography that precedes it, implying subtly that all is not what it seems as vision is manipulated by the mechanics of the medium. The slowing of the action within the scenes, together with the removal of all diegetic sound while the song plays, creates a disturbing illusion of altered reality as if these scenes have been lifted out of the

narrative and partnered with the disjunctive musical track by entirely non-diegetic means. This impression mimics the process of film production, replicating and reinforcing the artificiality of the medium whilst invoking an appreciation of the technical ability demonstrated in the combinations of visual and audible stimuli. Rather than normalising graphic violence through the combination of popular music with 'extended displays of violence against the malefic backdrop of the destruction of symbols of American progress', this sequence isolates violence through the sensorium and enacts it as a principally disquieting and discomforting narrative event.[52] A subtle subordination of vision to the auditory sense is enacted through the artificial slowing of the film. The film and song achieve a heightened sense of synchronicity as their tempos are more closely aligned, but the exchange is subtler than mere mimicry as the modalities draw closer and begin to augment one another.

This is by no means a technique unique to Zombie's filmmaking. Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) pairs Beethoven's Ninth Symphony with violence, and subsequently the counter-conditioning of that violence. Rather than being starkly counter-intuitive, however, the combination actually enacts a synthesis between the audible and visual components. The dramatic staccato opening of Beethoven's symphony, for example, emulates the visual impact of bodily violence whilst the upbeat tempo intimates at the frivolity Alex displays whilst participating in such acts. The seemingly mismatched musical accompaniment has, through the sonorous similarities between melody and visual content, 'the effect not of freezing emotion but rather of intensifying it, by inscribing it on a cosmic background'.[53] In this manner, these scenes of paired sensory experiences take on the quality of cross-modal emulation as one sense attempts to mimic the phenomenal qualities of another in a different medium. If as Vernallis claims, the music video aims 'to match a song's shape, texture and flow', I propose that a similar dynamic is at work in contemporary film as visual scenes are increasingly paired with audio tracks that are, on first hearing, apparently inappropriate.[54]

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[52] Fletcher, p. 82.
[53] Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, ed. by Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 8.
[54] Vernallis, p. 175.

The partnering of such disparate images and sound in *House of 1,000 Corpses* results in the sentimental country track revealing a different aspect of itself as it effectively becomes 'mapped' to the violent image. The lyrics 'when my life is through, and the angels ask me to recall, the thrill of them all' become connotative of not only the lost love indicated in the song but of the sadistic 'thrill' that Otis receives through murder and the voyeuristic 'thrill' the viewer may feel through watching violent films. The superimposition of this song over these scenes foregrounds the violence and suggests a profound disturbance of normality which is underscored by presenting depravity in such a whimsical manner. This sequence concludes with Nash kneeling and Otis' gun resting on his forehead; the scene is still and silent as the camera slowly zooms out for twenty-five seconds. This elongated moment of eerie stillness further separates the preceding sequence from diegetic events and intensifies the sense of abnormality. The silence of the audible sphere imbues the image – which was previously 'alive' with movement, manipulation, noise, and emotion – with a curious stasis not dissimilar to the frustrating effect of *Gut*'s motionless camera. The viewer maps the silence onto the elongated camera pan, *sees* the audible sphere in terms of the visual as one modality lends itself to the other while the viewer anticipates the inevitable ending of the scene.

Michel Chion claims that 'we never see the same thing when we also hear; we don't hear the same thing when we see as well' to demonstrate the complex relationship between audio and vision.[55] In the example above, the confluence of stimuli discourages the feeling of shock usually associated with scenes of this ilk in, for example, *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974).[56] The discontinuity between hearing and vision mimics the discontinuity between modes of looking in *The Poughkeepsie Tapes*. As the opening chords of the song sound, a different way of 'seeing' is offered. *House of 1,000 Corpses* explores the limits of visual reliance through invocation of the sensorial malleability of the filmic image. Whilst the visual junctures created in *The Poughkeepsie Tapes* by the degradation of the image

[55] Chion, p. xxvi.
[56] The dissipation of shock prevails in Zombie's work and contributes to what Weibe Taylor identifies as the suggestion 'that the capacity for brutality is something all humans still share'. Displaying violence with such brutality, however, also resists recreating the sensational violence that critics of the media, such as Mediawatch-UK, blame for negatively influencing viewers. Arguably, brutal portrayals of pain and suffering do not desensitise the viewer as much as reveal the embodied nature of pain that more stylised depictions perhaps negate. Weibe Taylor, p. 230.

encourage movement between the two different types of vision – optical and haptic looking – the audio-visual junctures in *House of 1,000 Corpses* encourage movement and exchange between two different sensory modalities. As the silence finds synchrony with the retreat of the camera from the scene of violence the viewer is transported from the audible realm of the musical overture to the visible realm of the image, with their attention directed by the audible stimuli to a certain aspect of the visible field.

It is in this way that images in *House of 1,000 Corpses* and *The Poughkeepsie Tapes* take on the quality of a multisensory haptic. Vision is given 'the impression of seeing for the first time, [of] gradually discovering what is in the image rather than coming to the image already knowing what it is'.[57] Instead of being pre-categorised based on the viewer's experience of horror film, the images are experienced first-hand, as it were, through a type of vision 'that is not merely cognitive but acknowledges its location in the body' through its indebtedness to other senses.[58] This is not a reductive MTV aesthetic, but an expansive and interactive multisensory mode. The haptic image is one that presents a confluence of sensory experiences to its viewer that encourages them 'to dissolve [their] subjectivity in […] close and bodily contact' with the film, such that the significance of the image is constructed through the viewer's own embodied knowledge and experience.[59] The viewer does not need to have experience of the *acts* depicted in such imagery but merely needs to draw upon their embodied experiences of sound, vision, and the haptic tactility of those senses as they transition between modalities. In doing so the image instigates an explicitly multisensory interaction with, and response to, the film.

It is this notion of sensory stimulation being infused within cinematic scenes that may otherwise have deep sociocultural signification that I would like to explore in the following chapters. I propose that for each 'visual' frame there is an underlying layer of sensory stimulation that contributes to the way in which it is sensed, presented and used by the viewer. This layer of sensory input is accessed through the eyes and ears of the viewer but inherently appeals to additional modes of sensory

[57] Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, p. 178.
[58] Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, p. 132.
[59] Marks, *Touch*, p. 13.

experience in two ways. Firstly, it can invoke the senses in the content of its visual images, the composition of individual frames and through the contrasts it can offer. Thus, the combination of smooth skin and the coarse weave of the sheet it lies upon in *Gut* both stimulate the viewer's experience of touch, and the combination of a blue overlay and lightly sweating brows evokes the experience of temperature sensation. Secondly, film can appeal to the senses through the foregrounding of its own sensorial form. *The Poughkeepsie Tapes*, for example, replicates the disjointed filmic structure in its discontinuous visual disturbances, using one to enhance and sometimes contradict the other. Often, these two methods of appealing to the viewer's senses are used in tandem, combining elements of the visual with elements of the multisensory nature of the medium to produce the type of ambivalent viewing experience constructed by *House of 1,000 Corpses*. I would like to suggest that extreme horror is particularly adept at manifesting this bodily dimension because of its subject matter.

Persistent images of the violated and distressed body lend themselves readily to the articulation of an embodied response to the onscreen events. A shared experience of textures, sounds, pressures, events and people, along with empathically geared mirror neurons, encourage the viewer to relate what happens on the screen to their own experiences regardless of the experiential distance between the two.[60] It is certainly not unique in this manner but, as a subgeneric branch of mainstream cinema, it has uniformly expressed a sustained turn towards intense bodily sensation. It is because of the body that human beings are able to live and function as they do. It seems necessary, therefore, to attempt to reinstate the body of the viewer into a film theory that deals explicitly with spectatorship and to emphasise the difference between certain terms commonly ascribed to theories of spectatorship and perception. The fundamental difference between sensation and perception needs to be reiterated such that sensation refers explicitly to the physiological stimulation of the human body via the sensory organs, whilst perception refers to the cognitive processes that occur as a direct and almost immediate result of the sensation. To sense a

[60] It is unlikely that many viewers of horror films have encountered such life-or-death scenarios. This does not, however, detract from the shared basis of understanding that humans have through their mutual experience of their bodies and the way that those bodies allow access to the world. Caressing and eviscerating a body may be beyond the remit of the majority of cinemagoers but caressing is still a shared bodily experience evoked by the film.

phenomenon is not to perceive it, although to perceive it necessitates a commensurate sensation.

When considering vision, the sensation of a phenomenon has different levels of development: the immediate ocular system contained within the eye; the optic neural pathway and the accessory optic pathway that connect the optic nerve to multiple integration centres in the brain; and, finally, the interconnectivity of each integration centre in the brain. A detailed discussion of how a phenomenon presents itself to the eye, the refraction of light through the lens, the function of the retina and the inversion and reorientation of the visual field has only limited applicability to an analysis of film engagement. Arguably, considering only the mechanics of the eye objectifies the human body and reduces visual phenomena to mere mechanical functions. The neuronal optical pathways, however, provide a richer source of information that bridges the gap between the purely physical sensation of the image and the cognitive interpretation of that image. For instance, the multiple optic pathways connecting the eyeball to the brain are populated with neurons that 'respond to visual movements in preferred directions' and that are aligned with the major planes of bodily orientation.[61] In isolation this fact may seem irrelevant, but when taken in consideration with human physical experience and social imperatives, a physical predisposition towards the sensing of directional movement along specific orientations may, in fact, serve to guide conscious attention and influence those factors of the visual scene that are deemed to be important. It is within this dynamic and complex relation between physiology and cognition that the viewing body can be rediscovered in the cinematic experience and instated as a primary organiser of perceptions and conscious understanding.

The following chapters will address the ways in which vision, casually considered as the primary cinematic sense, can be corporealised in such a way that the viewing experience can no longer be considered as an exclusively single-sense process. Spectatorship is no longer primarily situated within the eyes or 'mind' of the viewer but rather within their entire neural network as multisensory systems are stimulated, simulated and appealed to. The discussion will map connections between

[61] Berthoz, p. 64.

the less frequently explored senses, including the vestibular (balance and orientation) and gustatory (taste and smell) senses, and the broader sensory experiences of touch and pain. The ways in which the physiological experience of the embodied individual guides the construction of conscious frameworks of understanding will be explicated in order to argue that the human body provides much of the structures of comprehension that enable the interpretation of the phenomenal world. As a result, the multisensory medium of film, and particularly (although not exclusively) extreme horror film, has the potential to deliver a highly excitatory experience to its viewers that not only depicts bodies *in extremis* but also entices *their* bodies to enter into the filmic experience.

Chapter 2 – Vestibular Manipulation in *The Collector* (2009) and *The Descent* (2005)

In the previous chapter it was argued that vision is never isolated in the human sensorium and that the eye acts as a conduit to other sensory modalities. In the case of the found footage films analysed, it was contended that the manipulation of what could and could not be seen facilitated a juncture in the visual process between viewing the image as a coherent, socially significant whole and viewing the image as a collection of less cohesive sensory stimulations. At times these stimulations coincide to create points of contact between the visual and the multisensory haptic, a point of slippage in which the viewer transitions between modes of viewing in a truly multisensory film experience.[1] In these moments of sensory overload the body of the viewer is drawn into the viewing experience. At its most effective the result is distracting and discomforting in a way that serves to emphasise the heightened emotion or violence depicted on the screen.

The Poughkeepsie Tapes, for example, features a portion of home video shot by the killer that suggests the murder of a young girl. Throughout the film the home video camera claims authenticity through its handheld style and the visual distortion and degradation noted in the previous chapter that encourages the viewer to look upon the image not as part of a coherent whole, because coherence is systematically denied by the structure of the film, but as an image in its own right. Coupled with this application of the home video aesthetic is the strict manipulation of what the viewer is allowed to see. The scene in question begins as the camera, being operated from inside a car, tracks over a domestic scene showing a girl playing outside her house. The field of vision jostles from side to side as the killer gets out of the car. The motion of the visual field on the one hand suggests the movements and actions of the killer and on the other hand fragments the viewer's vision and disallows a sense of continuity from one frame to the next. The killer approaches the girl and asks a series of questions that culminates in him asking 'you want to see what it looks like through the camera?' The camera then rotates as the killer offers it to the girl. Off screen a

[1] These sensorial transition points are, in their instigation, comprised of bodily reflexes to stimuli that are incongruent or otherwise 'out of the ordinary'. Layers of psychosocial knowledge and experience then augment these moments of corporeal awareness as the viewer consciously contemplates their appearance, function and purpose within a narrative. As the discussion continues, the interactions between bodily sensation and psychosocial contemplation will be explored more fully.

thudding sound is heard, followed very quickly by the rapid movement of the camera as the killer runs back to the car. The camera is again jostled as he gets into the vehicle before eventually falling onto its side on the passenger seat, stranding the viewer's vision in an unfamiliar axis. This technique offers the authenticity sought by the found-footage premise and prevents important events from appearing onscreen but it also appeals to the viewer's sense of movement and balance. At the climax of the scene the viewer is locked into a viewing position that visually contradicts his or her own knowledge of bodily orientation. The spell of the cinema is momentarily broken as vision is used as a gateway to the physiological manipulation of our sense of kinesis, of orientation and balance.

The following discussion will contend that owing to its physiological co-dependency with the vestibular system – the portion of the inner ear that detects bodily directionality, velocity, inertia and gravity – the eye provides the point of access to the human experience of balance. The link between vision and balance will be explicated by reviewing cinematic techniques that draw upon the embodied understanding of the sensation with illustrative examples from Rob Zombie's *House of 1,000 Corpses* (2003) and *Halloween* (2007). It will then be proposed that the congruence, or otherwise, of the visual and vestibular systems can manipulate the viewer's understanding of horror film through appeals to both the physical experience of balance and the metaphorical concepts that arise from that experience. It will be suggested that Marcus Dunstan's *The Collector* (2009) manipulates physiological and metaphorical understandings of balance in order to generate an effectively embodied viewing experience. The cogent link between the experience of balance, and the psychosocial signification of balance as a component of the visual and audible fields will then be explored with reference to Neil Marshall's *The Descent* (2005).

Visual-vestibular Manipulation

It has been noted that the fundamental mechanics of vision – the way in which light enters the eye, is refracted by the lens and stimulates the rod and cone cells of the retina – is potentially an unproductive avenue of exploration when considering a viewer's reaction to contemporary horror cinema. This did not intend to suggest,

however, that the very method through which humans access the visual world is irrelevant to a discussion of how a film is viewed but rather to suggest that the visual system is much more complex than the well-known mechanics of the specialised sensory organ. To a certain extent these mechanics are unseen and unperceived by the individual and, although they impose limits upon what *can* be seen – humans cannot see ultraviolet light for example – they do not necessarily hold sway over *how* the visual world is interpreted. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes,

> when I say that I see the house with my own eyes, I am saying something that cannot be challenged; I do not mean that my retina and crystalline lens, my eyes as material organs, go into action and cause me to see it; with only myself to consult, I can know nothing about this.[2]

For Merleau-Ponty, the inner workings of the eye are unknown to the beholder and secondary to the fact of perception itself. *I see the house* is a truth regardless of the flexibility of the human ocular system. But what is *a house*? A house is a collection of features and properties that are recognised as being combined in a specific way to produce a coherent concept that we associate with the signifier *house*. Human concepts are typically elastic and generalised, thus allowing for the classification of many different types of houses under the same category heading. What would happen, then, if the human eye morphologically altered itself to be able to see ultraviolet, infrared and radio wave light sources? If we could spontaneously see properties not explicitly associated with the visual concept of a house – density or temperature, for example – the category would undergo considerable semantic augmentation. The organic specificities of the eye establish the parameters for how and what we can conceptualise.

The same logic applies to the medium of film: the manner in which *I see the film* can only ever be a descriptive endeavour concerning what might be considered as pure physiology. As this investigation intends to focus upon the way in which physiology influences the application and interpretation of what is seen, it is enough, in relation to the organs of sight, to state that the film *is seen* without detailed

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[2] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 1962), p. 67.

description of how that occurs. It is the extraneous elements of the ocular system – the optic nerve, the accessory optic neuronal pathway and the visual sensory cortex and association cortex in the brain – that provide the opportunities for insight into the 'certain manner of approaching the object' on which Merleau-Ponty focused his phenomenological inquiries, and that this chapter will explore.[3]

The human eye is particularly adept at sensing, following and predicting movement and this primacy of kinesis – principally enabled by the fovea – incorporates and perhaps reflects the evolutionary importance of motion to human survival. It is the affective significance of motion (or lack thereof) that allows found footage films to effectively communicate violence and terror through the stylistics of the subgenre. This is not the only function of the fovea; the area of the retina that allows sharp visual clarity upon an isolated portion of the visual field also guides our visual perception and our conceptualisation of the 'visual field' itself. As each successive area of the visual landscape becomes focused upon the fovea, the surrounding area fades in clarity which encourages the viewing individual to consider the landscape as being constituted by multiple discrete areas or objects. This segregation of the ocular space is further reinforced by our 'bodily movements, manipulations and experiences' that suggest that we, like the objects we view successively, are a bounded and discrete entity.[4] This combination leads to a critical ontological metaphor: the body as a container. The human being conceives of him or herself as a container – with an inside (me), an outside (the world) and a boundary (the skin) – not unlike the various containers we make use of every day (houses, cars, cups, our stomachs).

This ontological metaphor structures not only how we think about ourselves, but also how we can categorise the world around us. The visual field becomes a container – it has an inside (what can be seen), an outside (what cannot be seen) and a boundary (human eyes respond to light frequencies between 430-790 THz, the highest and lowest values representing the boundary). Even abstract notions can be conceptualised in this manner as the auditory field, a space that is principally

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[3] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* p. 67.
[4] Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 34. The implications of conceptualising the body as a container will be discussed in further detail in the following chapter that addresses Tom Six's *The Human Centipede* franchise.

imaginary, is a container with an inside (what can be heard), an outside (what cannot be heard) and a boundary (human hearing ranges between 20-20,000 Hz). One only has to look at the language commonly used to describe these 'containers', often referred to as fields. A field is, of course, a clearly segregated bounded space with an inside and an outside. Another quality of bounded entities is that they have the capacity to contain objects. If our bodies are indeed the prototypical containers, the directionality and arrangement of those objects will be significant as the bodily experience of balance is extrapolated for application to our abstract containers. Bodily balance is controlled by the visual and vestibular systems working in concert and it is this co-dependency that allows film to physically and metaphorically manipulate the viewer's sense of balance.

Human infants are born with many sensorimotor capacities relatively undeveloped: they are able to see and hear but are unable to maintain an upright posture or control the movement of their heads with any degree of accuracy. A primary act of learning for an infant, therefore, is experiencing the forces of inertia and gravity through the vestibular organs of the inner ear thus gaining knowledge of the position of their own bodies in space through proprioceptive receptors in the skin, tendons and muscles, and then learning to coordinate this information to enable them to support the weight of their head and eventually to support their trunk.[5] Together the vestibular apparatus can detect the direction in which the head is facing and whether the head is moving or stationary. The vestibular system is ambiguous, however, and confuses 'head tilt, acceleration, and deceleration [with] visual inputs [being] necessary to resolve this'.[6] The information regarding head position and velocity is

[5] The vestibular apparatus is located behind the mechanism of sound detection in the inner ear and consists of two components: a pair of vestibular sacs called the utricle and saccule; and, three semi-circular canals. Each canal originates from and returns to the utricle; is set at right angles to the other two; is filled with a fluid called endolymph and approximates a major plane of the head: horizontal, vertical and frontal. Information regarding head tilt and acceleration from the vestibular system is combined with visual, proprioceptive and kinaesthetic information to stimulate appropriate bodily adjustments and responses. The vestibular system is connected to the vestibular branch of the cochlear nerve and, evolutionarily, is older than the capacity to hear. C. U. M. Smith, *Biology of Sensory Systems* (Chichester: Wiley, 2000), p. 101; Neil R. Carlson, *Foundations of Behavioural Neuroscience*, 8th edn (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011), p. 191-3. Proprioception refers to the individual's knowledge of the position of its own body in space. Such information is relayed through receptors in skin, muscle and joints that detect flexion, tension and stretch in the structural components of the human body. This information in turn gives rise to a sense of movement, or kinesthesia, that allows the individual to comprehend the positioning, velocity and movement of their body.

[6] Alain Berthoz, *The Brain's Sense of Movement*, trans. by Giselle Weiss (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 32.

combined with visual, proprioceptive and kinaesthetic information to refine the vestibular input and stimulate appropriate responses.[7] The physical experience of balance is, therefore, a complex integration of a multisensory system of inputs that can be manipulated by any one, or a combination of, the modalities that influence the conscious perception that arises as the sum of the multiple sensations.

Perhaps the easiest to demonstrate, and the most pertinent to the study of film, is the direct relationship between visual and vestibular information. One such example would be the Cine360 that appeared at the Alton Towers resort in the UK in the mid-1980s. Consisting of a panoramic, domed screen the attraction displayed short films taken from the front of a roller coaster train. Viewers would stand in the dome and in order to track the movement of the coaster had to perform significant head, neck and trunk movements. The result was a convincing emulation of the experience of riding the coaster that generated a sense of motion and often imbalance that was not universally well received. In this instance the otoliths of the inner ear would not be detecting motion of the body in response to gravity because the gravitational force acting upon the stationary body remained constant, but the eyes would be relaying information that the body was in fact moving. Because the screen occupied the entire field of vision there were no referents against which to disprove this and so the disparity between the visual and vestibular stimuli would result in imbalance and potentially nausea. What this and other similar visual illusions demonstrate is that it is possible to stimulate a combination of sensory receptors in such a way that a viewer is physically unbalanced, despite remaining stationary and grounded at all times.[8]

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[7] Smith, p. 101.

[8] The vestibular system's influence upon the correct balance of the body is perhaps most obvious when under the influence of alcohol. Extreme intoxication can lead to a sensation of the room spinning, something that often becomes more pronounced when the eyes are closed. Alcohol affects the density of the endolymph in the inner ear – a thick gel-like substance that fills the semi-circular canals. The cupula of these canals – a wider chamber – contains hair-like projections that respond to the movements of the endolymph in order to detect motion. Normally, the hair-like projections convey accurate information regarding head tilt and viewing direction. Under the influence of alcohol, however, the endolymph undergoes a change of density, which results in it moving more freely in response to smaller stimuli (like gravity, for example). The increased movement in the endolymph causes an increase in receptivity of the hair-like projections, in turn causing the sensation that the body is in constant motion. This effect becomes more pronounced when the eyes are closed as visual information no longer contradicts the vestibular sense of imbalance.

Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) contains a famous cinematic example of the sensation and simulation of imbalance achieved by utilising the dolly zoom, or contra-zoom, such that the background of the shot appears to change perspective whilst the foreground remains stationary. While the visual field appears to report a change of perspective that suggests the viewer is moving closer to the object onscreen, the vestibular system detects no change in gravitational forces that would suggest such acceleration. The contra-zoom succinctly mimics the sensation of vertigo, whereby great heights induce dizziness, felt by John Ferguson (James Stewart) in Hitchcock's film. The shot is used twice in *Vertigo*, once when Ferguson looks down from a rooftop and once when he looks down a large flight of stairs in order to convey to the viewer the disorientation felt by the protagonist. Following Hitchcock's pioneering use of the technique, the dolly zoom has been used across genres as an extra-diegetic device aimed at communicating an emotional, rather than physiological reaction.[9] Rob Zombie's *House of 1,000 Corpses* (2003), for example, makes use of the dolly zoom as victim Denise enters a labyrinth of underground tunnels: here the technique intimates the fantastical nature of the final scenes of Zombie's film, the expansive nature of the warren-like tunnels and the futility of Denise's escape attempts. What it does not do, however, is communicate a physical sensation that is experienced by the character. Denise does not experience vertigo as she enters the tunnels, but rather a generalised sensation of disorientation and fear. The dolly zoom here is utilised primarily for the benefit of the viewer and not the narrative. As a result of its continued appropriation by many genres of cinema, including blockbuster and animated titles, the dolly zoom's wider connotations lend it an air of stylised cliché.

The found footage subgenre of horror has been discussed in the previous chapter but it is worth noting that alongside the visual disturbance, the unsteady nature of the camera movements and the often-obliquely canted angles that typify this

[9] A fast contra-zoom was used by Steven Spielberg in *Jaws* (1975) to communicate the emotional reaction of Chief Brody (Roy Scheider) to seeing the shark swimming amongst bathers. Disney's animated film *The Lion King* (1994) uses a simulated shot that achieves a similar effect when Simba realises that a wildebeest stampede is heading towards him. Although in this instance it is the foreground perspective that changes and the background that remains stationary this visual-vestibular incongruence remains such that the shot is disorienting and suggestive of an intense emotive reaction on the part of the protagonist. These examples serve to reiterate the emotional response intended to be communicated through these scenes – they operate upon the viewer to manipulate their interpretation of the scene, but they do not communicate the *physiological* experience of a character.

style of film, the subgenre also incorporates visual-vestibular disturbances to increase the communication of panicked movement that mirrors the high emotion in its more kinetic scenes.[10] Sensory manipulation in film can operate both inter-diegetically to communicate a facet of the on-going narrative or extra-diegetically as a technique that appeals to the viewer and manipulates their emotional response. The crucial aspect of inter-diegetic sensory manipulation is that it contributes significantly to the narrative. While it may be said that these techniques encourage the viewer to take notice of the technological medium as opposed to the violent content of horror films, they also often invite the viewer to engage bodily with the film. The horror genre is concerned specifically with the human body, its tribulations, and limitations. As such the incorporation of cinematographic techniques that encourage the viewer to engage bodily is an expression of form mirroring content. As the bodies onscreen undergo myriad sensorial changes so do the bodies before the screen. While cinematography can momentarily interrupt the viewers' physiological knowledge of their own body by presenting incongruent visual information, a more sustained effect is achieved through combining such camerawork with the extensive metaphorical understanding of *balance* that arises from bodily experience.

[10] A particularly effective visual-vestibular combination occurs in Barry Levinson's *The Bay (II)* (2012). The film is constructed from found-footage segments that include home video recordings and the amateurish recordings of a trainee journalist, and documents the outbreak of a parasitic epidemic in a busy seaside resort in America. The fast-acting parasites are ingested through the water supply and eat their hosts from the inside. As the situation progresses and order begins to break down in the small town, there is a short scene that makes use of the viewer's sense of motion and disequilibrium to emphasise the severity of the situation. The scene is shot from the viewpoint of the CCTV inside a police car as the officer drives through the town. The darkened image resembles infrared night vision imagery in its lack of colour, contrast and detail. The entire visual field is manoeuvred as though it were on-board the car which leads to a convincing sense of motion, not dissimilar to the one elicited by the Cine360 attraction. The limitation of the visual field adds to the motion by obscuring details that could contradict the illusion. The prognostic brain assimilates the signifiers of motion and generates predictions: that the car will continue; that, owing to genre conventions, something will likely stop the car unexpectedly; that this something is likely to be illuminated by the headlights a split-second prior to stopping the car. Unexpectedly, however, the screen image is violently skewed and immediately removed from its established course without anything appearing in the field of vision. The lack of precursor to the abrupt change in direction generates a physical jolt of shock in the viewer as the car collides with something off screen. Despite the viewer's propensity to 'expect the unexpected' when viewing this type of film, the absolute lack of visual indication, coupled with the intense and immediate alteration of the image in terms of motion and orientation effectively mimics the sensation of the collision, albeit on a smaller scale.

Visual Balance

The primary experience of coordinated balance structures the metaphorical concept of *balance* and defines the stable components of human understanding. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson claim that 'no metaphor can ever be comprehended or even adequately represented independently of its experiential basis'.[11] Such an outlook situates the physical basis of metaphorical concepts as essential to an understanding of how human beings apply and interpret those concepts. In essence, *balance* is understood as equal distribution along an axis because when infants learn to balance it is an act of distributing weight and forces equally around the vertical axis that allows them to remain stable and upright. The planes of bodily orientation signified by the vestibular apparatus correspond to the major planes of movement and 'form a basic egocentric frame of reference' which structures the way we conceptualise our bodies and environment.[12] Alain Berthoz goes on to make an argument for the planes of orientation of the body and the vestibular system structuring even the most abstract of notions, including Euclidean geometry. The crux of the argument rests upon the fact that because the body can orient and move in three dimensions – the dimensional axes of the vestibular organs – it is a natural progression to adopt a working three-dimensional model of reality.[13] The concept that *balance* refers to the equal distribution of mass or force along an axis becomes intuitive when one considers that when we stand, gravitational and kinaesthetic forces are equalised along the horizontal and vertical axes of our body and in order to remain upright we must learn how to manipulate these forces. In addition, our bodies have superficial visual balance as they display a left-right equivalency, or bilateral symmetry. If the human body was constructed or oriented differently, in the manner of a quadruped for example, then the conceptualisation of balance would be markedly different. As Mark Johnson notes, the meaning of balance 'begins to emerge through

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[11] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors we Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 19.
[12] Berthoz, p. 36.
[13] Berthoz, pp. 36-37. The very nature of three-dimensional embodiment, however, prevents this theory from attaining any status higher than an observational coincidence: it would require an animal able to orient and move in more or less than three dimensions, with the ability to communicate across species, in order to support or falsify such a claim for direct causality.

our *acts* of balance and through our *experience* of systemic processes and states within our bodies'.[14]

Balance has an organic meaning that develops not from the nuances of linguistics, but from the interrelations of physical sensations and experience. The specificity of the concept together with its adaptability implies an immediate, experiential basis; a series of events that allow an individual to become accustomed to a given principle. As such, the embodied actions of the individual, including direct bodily sensation and the manipulation of other discrete objects in the environment, give rise to specific concepts that are so tightly enmeshed with the experience that they become almost indiscernible. 'Above', for example, is conceptualised as a relative term that places one object above another and the direct correlate of this notion arises from discovering objects in relation to one's own physical position. Indeed, the specificities of the bodily experience that give rise to the concept 'above' render the notion relative not only to the body but to the organ that most explicitly orients an individual's knowledge of their own physicality: the eye. 'Above' is not only above the body, but also very specifically above the eye-line of the body. Rather than refuting the Saussurean notion that the relationship between signifier and signified is entirely arbitrary, the inherent connection between terms such as 'above' and experience lies within the comprehension of the concept: 'above' may as easily be labelled 'below' and signify the same concept if the underlying structures of experience remain the same. The concept of *balance* exists before language as babies learn through their manipulations of their own bodies that balance entails the equal distribution of weight along an axis. Only later do they acquire the linguistic sign that goes on to signify the metaphorical concept of *balance* as applied to other objects. In order to comprehend correctly the human schema of balance one must have experienced some form of physical balance and it is this experience that goes on to structure the metaphorical understanding and application.[15]

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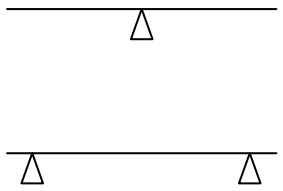
[14] Johnson, *The Body in the Mind*, p. 75.

[15] It should be stressed that this experiential basis does not apply to all human concepts, but it does apply specifically to a set of ontological metaphors and body schemata that provide the foundations for the ways in which we are able to perceive and interpret phenomena. The metaphors being elucidated here are those most closely associated with bodily experience, what Lakoff and Johnson term 'orientational metaphors' (front-back, top-bottom) and 'ontological metaphors' (container, in-out, balance).

Figure 2.1: Metaphor of Balance



Once extrapolated from experience in metaphor the concept of balance (represented visually in Figure 2.1) can be adapted: the axes can be manipulated to the horizontal or vertical planes; the axis itself can be negated and reconstituted as balance around a given point as in the case of circular symmetry; and, it can be extended further into the realm of metaphor as 'weight' is subsumed by information or effort. We can therefore speak of an argument being 'balanced' if the points on each side of the metaphorical axes have equal weighting or importance. Another extrapolation of the balance schema can be found when we speak of visual or auditory stimuli being balanced.

When referring to the formal aspects of film frame composition, the balance of the scene is often cited as reinforcing or undermining the activity or passivity of the various characters. This notion of balance has two frames of reference: balance around the central point, or along an axis with the centre of the frame often representing some sense of normalcy. John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978), for example, often reinforces the central axis with the use of vertical and horizontal lines. Figure 2.2 (below) shows a low-angled shot from the film that uses the clothes rail as a central line, effectively splitting the frame into two roughly equal parts. Michael Myers is then positioned slightly off-centre in the right side of the frame, leaning around the door with much of his body hidden. As Carol Clover observes in *Men, Women and Chain Saws* (1992) this type of shot typically positions the camera, and therefore the spectator, in the role of victim. While the camera-victim remains central in this frame – something that is reinforced throughout the rest of the film with Laurie Strode's frame position being predominantly central – Michael has to reach into the wardrobe, compromising his balance in order to be in view of the camera. Additionally, Michael's looming body on one side of the frame creates disequilibrium within the scene, as there is no similarly sized object to the left to balance him. As a result, this particular camera angle and frame composition serves to reinforce identification with the camera-victim whilst subtly disempowering Michael, despite his size and apparent domination of the scene.

Figure 2.2: John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978)

The effectiveness of the disempowerment of the antagonist through the manipulation of frame balance can be clearly seen when comparing the above technique – one of many that characterised Carpenter's seminal contribution to the slasher subgenre – with the remake, *Halloween* (2007), directed by Rob Zombie. William Wandless claims that Zombie's remake functions as a 'homage to and radical revision of the 1978 original' and there are certainly stylistic differences.[16] The iconic shock cut-stinger combination is all but absent and nearly a third of Zombie's remake is dedicated to depicting the teenage Michael at Smith's Grove Sanatorium. It is the smaller, but no less important details of frame composition and editing that provide the film with its most notable difference, however.[17] Figure 2.3, below, shows a typical shot from Zombie's remake and immediately the differences in frame balance and composition are noticeable.

[16] William Wandless, 'Spoil the Child: Unsettling Ethics and the Representation of Evil', *LIT: Literature Interpretation Theory*, 22 (2011), 134-54 (p. 138).

[17] An interesting comparison of shot duration and density between Carpenter's original and Zombie's remake has been carried out by Nick Redfern. Using time series clusters applied to shot length Redfern was able to produce a set of graphical representations of the shot density of both films. When shot densities were normalised and the differences in duration accounted for, Zombie's shot density peaked higher and fluctuated less than Carpenter's indicating that both films had a significantly different pace and structure. While Carpenter builds tension through the increase in shot transitions to the climax of the film, Zombie's film shows little fluctuation from its higher baseline indicating a sustained level of tension that perhaps detracts from the sense of narrative movement. Nick Redfern, 'Time series clustering and the analysis of film style', *Cinemetrics.lv* (2013) <http://www.cinemetrics.lv/dev/redfern_q3_opt.pdf > [accessed 25 June 2014].

Figure 2.3: Rob Zombie's *Halloween* (2007)

The victim-identified camera angle is absent in Zombie's *Halloween*, with a third-party omniscient view being presented for much of the film. In contrast to Carpenter's composition above, there are relatively few markers within the frame that break up the 'white space' around the characters – shots are often framed by trees, the sides of characters' bodies or houses, but the central areas are more often dominated by the protagonists. Chief amongst them is Michael, who appears centrally in the frame much more frequently in Zombie's film than in Carpenter's original. In the still above, Michael dominates the visual space by being the largest and most central object in view and the majority of his body is positioned in the central section of the screen. In addition, his victim is dwarfed by his massive size and he looks down upon her, succinctly reinforcing the power dynamic. At no point in the narrative does the power shift to the Final Girl, as it does in Carpenter's original, as the balance remains perpetually with the unstoppable, mountainous Myers.

Visual frame balance is a combination of relations between objects onscreen, including: relative size, placement around the axis, shape, colour, movement, innate significance, and relative clarity of focus. In order to balance the frame in Figure 2.2, for example, a similarly sized human body would be needed on the left of the frame.

The image would then be segregated into thirds with a visually significant object in each section: Myers on the right, the clothes rail in the centre, and the additional body on the left.[18] In order to unbalance the frame in Figure 2.3, the victim would need to be much larger in order to detract from Myers' power and immediacy.

Figure 2.4: The Rule of Thirds

Unbalancing the Visual Field

Balance in the film frame can be constructed through a variety of means – the even spacing of objects throughout the space, for example – and the harmony engendered by that balance can subsequently affect the viewer's engagement with a particular scene. Similarly, imbalance can be generated by resisting the conventions of visual equilibrium. It can also, however, be stimulated by the technologies of cinema and simulated by manipulating the diverse metaphors that arise from

[18] The rule of thirds is a more subtle way of creating frame balance in cinema. Instead of clustering significant characters around the central axis, the frame is often constructed around a grid of third intervals. The frame is split horizontally and vertically into three sections, with characters and objects of importance being situated at the intersections of each third. As such, a frame with a human body positioned at third intervals from left to right will appear as balanced as one with the human in the centre.

physiological experience.[19] Marcus Dunstan's *The Collector* (2009) achieves a distinctive unbalancing of the visual field through its repeated invocation of the physiological experience. Often assigned to the 'torture porn' category of contemporary horror, the film deploys a simple plot: ex-convict Arkin must return to house burglary in order to raise money for his wife who owes a debt to loan sharks. Using his job as a way to stake out houses, Arkin identifies a large gemstone he wishes to steal. On returning to the house after nightfall, however, Arkin realises that someone else – The Collector – was also staking out the house for an entirely different reason. Arkin must run the gauntlet of The Collector's torturous traps as he attempts to escape.

Torture porn is, as Steve Jones argues, remarkably difficult to define.[20] Usually incorporating films as diverse as *Hostel* (2004), *The Devil's Rejects* (2005), *The Hills Have Eyes* (2006), *The Strangers* (2008) and *The Collector* (2009) the dynamics of the interrelation between violence and pornography are not always clear. Jones claims that the confusion over what torture porn is originates in the wide interpretations of the confluence of violence and pornography such that,

> on the one hand, the films are said to juxtapose violence with nudity, or emphasize sexual violence such as acts of rape and castration. On the other, they allegedly present non-sexual violence in such gory, close-up detail that their aesthetic is akin to pornography.[21]

The Collector is not an overtly sexual film – it contains only one scene of a sexual nature, which is dominated by The Collector's voyeurism rather than his sadism – but instead wears its sexualised connotations in the form of The Collector's gimp mask. A stylised version of the sadomasochistic costume 'ramped up to horror movie material' the mask, as noted by Gary Needham, dominates the film's publicity material to such an extent that it becomes the killer's signature look.[22] In addition, the preoccupation

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[19] *Up is good*, for example, is a metaphorical association evident in language (we get a pay *rise*, we get a foot on the property *ladder*, things look *up*, and so forth) that is principally based upon the upright posture of the human body.
[20] Steve Jones, 'The Lexicon of Offence: The Meanings of Torture, Porn and Torture Porn', in *Controversial Images: Media Representations on the Edge*, ed. by Feona Attwood, Vincent Campbell, I.Q. Hunter and Sharon Lockyer (London: Palgrave, 2013), pp. 186-200 (p. 187).
[21] Jones, 'The Lexicon of Offence', p. 187.
[22] Gary Needham, 'Bringing Out the Gimp: Fashioning the SM Imaginary', *Fashion Theory*, 18 (2014), 149-168 (p. 163).

with confinement – in trunks, basements or houses – and The Collector's own apparent fascination with watching the suffering of his victims make a clear case for the categorisation of the film as a visually titillating pornography of torture. What seems to be missing from many considerations of so-called torture porn films, however, is analysis of the way in which the film is presented to and subsequently interacts with the viewer. Rather than pornography indicating a definitive link to the sexual elements within these films, I would like to suggest that the term is instead associated with a mode of embodied fascination that emulates the embodied experience of arousal, but does not automatically necessitate the sexuality of its namesake. This mode of embodied fascination is facilitated through the combinations of form and content that incorporate and indoctrinate the viewer's body into the viewing experience. For *The Collector*, embodiment is facilitated through its exceptional appeals to the vestibular sense of balance and orientation. Indelibly tied to the impetus and experience of locomotion, the vestibular sense is adept to manifesting the frantic, life-preserving action represented in horror and it is this organic link that renders the viewing experience unstable.

The opening sequence of *The Collector* (2009) displays a distinct focus upon balance through its repeated emphasis upon bilateral symmetry and visual equilibrium. Prior to the credit sequence there is a sweeping right-pan of a house at night; a lit insect trap is situated in the left foreground and provides the only light as disproportionally large beetles crawl over one another (Figure 2.5, below). The juxtaposition of insects and signifiers of American suburban 'normality' echoes David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* (1986). Although lacking in the satirical tone of Lynch's all-too-perfect white, middle class America, the sentiment nonetheless remains as human society is underpinned, or encroached upon, by an animalistic anti-civilisation. In *The Collector* it is the intrusion of the insects – the fact that they appear in the foreground and attempt to overrun the additional signifiers of human society, such as the houses – that contributes to the sense of foreboding that is built into the opening scenes.

Figure 2.5: ***The Collector*** **(2009)**

In the scene above, the three-dormer bungalow is nestled behind the intrusive insect trap and gradually emerges to the right of the frame as the camera continues its smooth track. Despite the bungalow remaining unfocused in the background it retains a degree of visual importance for a number of reasons. It is initially familiar, easily recognisable from its bilaterally symmetrical dormer windows even though the low-key lighting scheme ensures it is kept primarily in shadow. Although the insect trap dominates the left third of the frame the fact that the bungalow slowly comes to occupy the second two-thirds gives it a compositional weight that further increases its importance. In addition, the most discernable and familiar of its characteristics, the dormer windows, are approximately positioned at third intervals along the horizontal axis. By positioning the lightest and most discernable feature of the bungalow at one of these intersections the house regains in visual weight what is lost through the unfocused, poorly illuminated nature of the scene. The high key lit and overly large insect trap is prominent but does not entirely overwhelm the perceived magnitude of the house. Despite its relative unimportance to the human viewer, the size, lighting, prominent frame position and the fact that it is oriented to the vertical axis draw the eye in such a way that the right and left portions of the frame seem to be equally filled with similarly sized objects. As a result of the combination of this visual equivalency, the smooth movement of the camera and the relative quietness of the soundtrack in this scene, there is a sense of calmness that pervades the shot in spite of the usual connotations of chiaroscuro lighting, the viewers' expectations of the genre and the horizontal orientation that subtly implies discomfort. Indeed, as this short sequence

progresses the initial calmness that finds its metaphor in images of balance recedes to tension as the eponymous collector terrorises the inhabitants of the bungalow.

During the following credit sequence intermittent images of frogs, millipedes, dung beetles and spiders are interposed with fleeting chiaroscuro images of an upright human body. The contrast between insect and human orientations provides a visual restatement of the assumption of the uniqueness of human existence as the bipedal figure stands alone among the insects, a collector and master of the vermin he hoards. Yet the proximity and repetition of the insects draws the human toward the perceived lower order of the insect world. The iconography of animals set against humanness generates a sense of ambiguity as 'the essential sameness/difference of the human/animal divide' becomes impressed upon the salient features of the film.[23] The human body is isolated in such a way that it stands out amongst the primal and primitive animals: the same and yet different in a domineering, overpowering sense. It is first implicitly equated with that of an animal and then a semi-sentient insect that is, to the human mind at least, incapable of higher order processing, emotion or compassion.[24] Human versus insect is a well-travelled path for horror film – from *Blue Velvet* and *The Fly* (1986) to *Tremors* (1990) and *The Human Centipede* (2009) – with arthropods and annelids having long been symbolic of the intrusive anti-human. That The Collector chooses to hoard these animals is indicative not only of his own difference or monstrosity but also the disavowal and dismemberment of the human body that is enacted by the film. The body is problematized by the presence of the insects as they at once connote radical inhumanness whilst retaining many of the experientially fundamental faculties of embodiment that question the special status of humans as 'civilised': like humans, the insects are bilaterally symmetrical, show cephalisation, build communities, generate communicative 'languages', designate tasks and participate in inter-community conflict.

The primary adaptations of the nervous system of a bilaterally symmetrical animal are: centralisation, whereby nerve fibres are bundled together in specific areas of integration (such as the spinal cord and areas of the brain in mammals) rather than

[23] Paul Wells, *The Animated Bestiary* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009), p. 28.
[24] The mechanisms and implications of aligning the human body with that of another, differentially orientated, animal will be considered later with reference to Tom Six's *The Human Centipede* where the human body is aligned first with that of a dog and ultimately with the eponymous centipede.

being disparately spread throughout the body; and, cephalisation, which is the concentration of major nervous system structures at one end of the animal (the head/brain in mammals).[25] In this juxtaposition of human and insect, the acts of human reasoning are reduced to the most basic presuppositions of survival and, more insidiously, the kind of curiosity that may motivate an avid collector of the insects. Significantly, both of these states, survival and morbid curiosity, are heavily mediated by bodily instinct and sensation. To be bilaterally symmetrical thus connotes a particular way of being in and experiencing the world that at once speaks directly to the specific experiences of being human and yet denies the uniqueness of that experience as it aligns embodiment with both human and insect alike. If 'our sense of what is real begins with and depends crucially upon our bodies' then the shape and principal structure of the body becomes an important and easily definable norm, but not necessarily an aspect that is universally unique to human existence.[26] This partial reduction of the human to insectoid suggests a reoriented outlook on embodied experience as the 'truth' of perception is accessed through the limited and curtailed body. The faculties of human existence that are placed above those shared with other animals – consciousness, empathy and emotion, for example – are partially subordinated to the structures of understanding that arise directly from the embodied existence that is common between all creatures.

Immediately following the credit sequence bilateral symmetry is constructed as a positive and stable attribute by associating the elements of physical and visual balance with ordinariness. The shot begins with a woodland panorama: the camera tracks smoothly and slowly through the landscape, lingering slightly on a remarkably detailed close-up of a spider as it descends from a tree branch (Figure 2.6, below). The spider's symmetry, in both shape and markings, connects it experientially to notions of natural order and the philosophical outlook that what is natural is necessarily harmonious, even if it may not be connotatively 'good'.

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[25] The greater levels of integration and coordination afforded by such structuring are beneficial to the quick processing of various stimuli and the semi-autonomic minute bodily and postural adjustments required for forward movement. Richard W. Hill, Gordon A. Wyse and Margaret Anderson, *Animal Physiology*, 3rd edn (Sunderland, MA: Sinauer, 2012), p. 399.

[26] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic, 1999), p. 17.

Figure 2.6: Spider's Descent, *The Collector*

This connotation of nature is reflected in the human tendency to search out and identify harmonious patterns both in manmade and naturalistic endeavours. Of specific relevance to the metaphor of *balance* is the notion of the Golden Ratio. Originally defined in Euclidean geometry as a methodology for the bisecting of a line, it is claimed that the ratio (1:1.618…) is expressed in the proportions of spiral galaxies, nautilus shells, Leonardo da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man* and Salvador Dalí's *The Sacrament of the Last Supper*. It is proposed to demonstrate the most aesthetically pleasing ratio of parts to the whole and psychological investigation has centred upon whether human beings exhibit a preference for things constructed using those proportions.[27] That the claim for the aesthetic pleasure and visual balance of the Golden Ratio persists demonstrates the impact that physiology has upon the way in which humans cognitively classify their world. If the sociocultural context of human civilisation is removed, temporarily, and the human is considered purely as a physiological being, the body becomes the primary frame of reference for experiencing and interpreting the world.[28] Because the body is bipedal, because the human animal can physically balance and because it perceives in its own materiality a bilateral symmetry that mimics that act, these factors come to define the normative

[27] As Mario Livio discusses in *The Golden Ratio*, however, many of these examples of the so-called 'divine proportion' at work 'involve numerical juggling' and often 'overlook inaccuracies in measurements'. The nineteenth-century psychological experiments conducted by Gustav Fechner likewise demonstrate inconclusive results as to whether subjects preferred the proportion of the Golden Ratio to other rectangular formations. Mario Livio, *The Golden Ratio* (London: Review, 2002), p. 46; p. 179.

[28] A purely philosophical endeavour, of course, since one cannot remove sociocultural influence from the behaviour of humans. Enculturation modifies physiological understanding immediately and over generations, but that does not negate the importance of embodied knowledge. Rather, it serves to recognise a synthesis between the two whereby both hold equal importance.

structures of understanding. These qualities are categorised as desirable – for how could the very mode of existence be undesirable? – and objects that are seen to share these qualities are judged accordingly as desirable and familiar.[29] Moreover, these qualities are then imposed upon other facets of human knowledge and understanding as a framework for relating the external world to the internal, or material, existence of the individual. This type of bodily knowledge is then absorbed into the sociocultural existence of the individual as the framework is adapted to suit changing experiences and technologies, but it nevertheless remains at the foundations of understanding.

In addition to these comforting associations of nature, more threatening connotations of insects and spiders are also evoked by this scene as we follow the spider's invasive movement through the visual field. Insects have long been a source of fascination for the Gothic and horror genres, in both written fiction such as Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (1915) and films like David Cronenberg's *The Fly* (1986) or David Marshall's *Arachnophobia* (1990), for their decidedly uncanny nature. In such works the connotations of natural order are set against the otherness of the insects' bodies to generate an object that is both familiar and threatening. Often, as in *The Fly*, the insect is used to question the sanctity of the human body. Although linked with scientific endeavour in Cronenberg's film, the domination of the human body by the insect nevertheless elicits an embodied reaction of primal fear. In this scene from *The Collector*, the spider descends from an unseen point and its proximity to the camera lens gives the movement an air of invasion. The foregrounding of the spider seems peculiar at this point in time as there has been no exposition, no dialogue and no real introduction to the narrative. The spider, a creature that commonly incites phobia, is an uninvited visitor to the camera's leisurely sweep that darkens the valorisation of nature that is implied by the opening panoramic sequence.[30]

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[29] There is no intent here to impose a sociocultural value judgment upon these qualities, but merely to highlight that standing upright and being balanced is generally more desirable than being imbalanced. This is then projected onto our understanding of other objects and events such that, for example, falling over is 'clumsy' which carries with it a slightly pejorative inflection.

[30] With its high-key lighting the opening panorama itself approaches a representation of what Immanuel Kant calls the 'mathematical sublime' in its overbearing desolation. As these scenes are so closely followed by images of houses, cars and people, however, the vastness of the natural world is subtly clipped in order to restrain the connotations and maintain focus upon the human aspects of the film (most notably the body). Kant's notion of the sublime and the way in which it inherently invokes the human body into its understanding will be further explored later in this chapter. Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, trans. with analytical indexes by James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 94.

The camera continues past the spider, emerges from the woodland and rests upon a large, Grecian style house whose imposing buttressed exterior mirrors the bilateral symmetry of the insects and vertical orientation of the human bodies that will shortly come to share the frame (Figure 2.7, below). Once again, the juxtaposition of scenes of undomesticated nature with symbols of human civilisation questions the perceived disparity between animals and humans as primary elements of conceptual understanding can be seen to be carried through from the insects, to the humans, and the human houses. Moreover, the symmetry and implied left-right balance that is inherent in this scene is extended further by the musical accompaniment. Patient 113's track *Awake to You* is a mid-pace ballad whose melody consists of a four-note refrain of third interval pairs repeated over four bars. This four bar sequence is then varied in rhythm and tone and provides the melodic structure of the track. Despite the variations, the repetition of the same sequence of notes and the preservation of the third interval create a harmonic tonal consonance that is smooth and even.[31] The track harbours an almost palindrome-like quality as it progresses and repeats individual notes, pairs of successive harmonic notes, pauses and the full melody. The music, like the house and spider, exhibits a comfortable balance that creates a calm, contemplative atmosphere and mimics the long sweeping movement of the camera.

[31] Tonal consonance and musical intervals provide another example of the human propensity to find balanced patterns in natural phenomena. Pythagoras is often said to have 'discovered' harmonic progressions in the musical scales by manipulating string-length to change the pitch of a note. While the C notes at either end of an octave stand in a ratio of 2:1 to each other, the harmonious fifth (notes in a 2:3 ratio) and fourth (notes in a 3:4 ratio) progressions stand approximately in the Golden Ratio to one another. It should be remembered, however, that mathematics has been imposed upon musical sound and is not an inherent property of the phenomena itself. Livio, p. 28.

Figure 2.7: Bilateral Symmetry and Vertical Bias as an Outer Representation of the Human Body, *The Collector*

Michel Chion draws a critical distinction between two functions of film music and the way in which each behaves within the cross-modal film.[32] Chion claims that,

> On one hand, music can directly express its participation in the feeling of the scene, by taking on the scene's rhythm, tone, and phrasing […] In this case we can speak of *empathetic music*, from the word empathy, the ability to feel the feelings of others.
>
> On the other hand, music can also exhibit conspicuous indifference to the situation, by progressing in a steady, undaunted, and ineluctable manner […] This juxtaposition of scene with indifferent music has the effect not of freezing emotion but rather of intensifying it, by inscribing it on a cosmic background. I call this second kind of music *anempathetic* (with the privative a-).[33]

In contrast to the anempathetic music addressed in the previous chapter, which had an augmenting effect upon the visual stimuli with which it was paired, the empathetic nature of the musical accompaniment in *The Collector* incorporates Chion's notion of *synchresis* as moments of cross-sensory simultaneity extend to produce a sustained replication of balance through both the visual and auditory registers. As the audio-

[32] I am using cross-modal here to refer to films that not only present multiple sensory stimulations (as all film arguably does), but that provide moments, scenes and sequences that draw the sensory modalities together until they contact one other, mingle and a produce a hybrid sensorial experience that cannot be reduced to any one of its concomitant sensorial 'streams'. Chion's audio-vision is neither wholly audible nor wholly visible, and yet it is both. Similarly, *The Collector*'s imbalance is neither wholly vestibular nor wholly visual but a fusion of both that is corporeally appealing and ambiguous.

[33] Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, ed. by Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 8.

visual becomes a combined multisensory field the effect of the invocation of balance upon the viewer is amplified to the point of discomfort. Contemporary horror often displays a preference for heavy metal music that usually contributes to the tension of the narrative, perhaps due to heavy metal's capacity to represent musically 'a dialectic of controlling power and transcendent freedom' that mimics the violent struggles of the horror film.[34]

The dissonant, rhythmic nature of heavy metal music finds synchresis in scenes of terror and violence and, in fact, the musical accompaniment to key scenes in many titles has become equally as iconic as the visuals. Marion Crane's death in *Psycho*, for example, is as synonymous with Bernard Herrmann's squealing violin chords as the rhythmic thrust of the knife. Similarly, John Carpenter's tension-building pursuit scenes in *Halloween* owe much to the iconic electronic score that explicates musically the repetition and anticipation of Myers' stalking. In most cases, then, extended synchresis between the audio-visual fields implies impending, and often unending, danger. In *The Collector*, however, the calmness of the visual scene that is replicated in the calmness of the audio track generates an atmosphere of serene balance whilst subtly indicating to the seasoned horror viewer that this balance will shortly be obliterated. It is in this way that these scenes first create a neutral atmosphere from which the narrative can then deviate: musical balance, and visual equilibrium and consonance indicate a diminished sense of tension or a degree of safety. Moreover, the subsequent manipulations and positioning of elements within each frame continue to build positive connotations of visual and audible balance whilst also positing the opposing imbalance as a metaphor for negative narrative effects, the pain of characters and a challenge to the sanctity of the human container-body.

One such manipulation of visual balance occurs once the protagonist, Arkin, has entered the Grecian house intent on stealing precious stones from the safe. Upon his arrival he realises that he is not alone and proceeds to move around quietly in an effort to evade the masked Collector. The camera follows Arkin as he moves from room to room, closing doors behind him to conceal his whereabouts. At the same time

[34] Robert Walser, *Running With the Devil: Power, Gender and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1993), p. 168.

The Collector is also moving from room to room and as yet there has been no explicit or implicit violence towards human bodies. This movement again stimulates an expectation within the viewer as doors open and close and the protagonist and villain pass within mere inches of one another. As the two men move through the house the camera is raised, smoothly via a small crane, in order to show a cross section of two rooms, separated by a wall (Figure 2.8, below. NB: the image has been artificially brightened for better visibility). Having entered the shot from a door at the bottom-right Arkin waits behind another door that separates the left and right halves of the screen. He hears The Collector approach from the top left and pause in front of a third door at the bottom left. The subtle disorientation caused by the camera apparently transitioning through the ceiling of the house is dissipated by the momentary pause in motion and sound: the scene is approximately balanced with a human body on either side of the frame. When movement is restored it flows anticlockwise as the collector first moves out of shot through the door at the bottom left and Arkin then follows by moving from right to left and out of shot. The motion of one body remains balanced by the equivalent movement of the other and the expectation of conflict brought about by the physical proximity of hunter and prey is not fulfilled: the ability to balance the visual field becomes a metaphor for the avoidance of conflict. It also, however, sustains the level of tension that has been subtly accumulating throughout the opening scenes and builds the viewer's sense of expectation.

Figure 2.8: Visual and Directional Balance, *The Collector*

The use of balance as a metaphor of safety is, however, challenged as Arkin becomes the victim of The Collector's arsenal of traps. Arkin attempts to make a phone call and as he lifts the receiver the viewer sees that his adversary has installed a

long spike in the earpiece. The length of the weapon would suggest that the target of its attack is not only the parts of the ear that facilitate hearing but also the vestibular apparatus that lies behind the cochlear organs. The loss of sensation and balance implied by the attack on the vestibular system is then visually embodied by a disorientating series of camera movements that follows the protagonist from room to room. The apex of this motion sees the camera apparently rotating through two axes of orientation simultaneously. The scene is constructed from two camera movements – one that sees a camera spiral to the left through the transverse plane, and another that shows a camera flip horizontally through the sagittal plane – which are then edited together to form what appears to be a smooth and disorientating aerial roll (Figure 2.9).

Figure 2.9: Camera Roll Through the Transverse and Sagittal Planes, *The Collector*

The circularity of the camera's movement is of critical significance to the stimulation of the vestibular system. The anatomy of the semi-circular canals, utricle and saccule of the inner ear enable the system to detect vertical and horizontal movement and rotary acceleration. 'The vestibular organs are suited to detect starts and stops and changes in motion, not constant velocities'.[35] As a result, the rotary motion of spinning is one of the more confusing movements for the vestibular system and is often the product of vestibular malfunction – as in the case of excessive alcohol consumption or seasickness. In order to augment the vestibular sensation of spinning, which is actually a quick succession of changes in motion and velocity, the visual system is required. During a spin, the eye performs several movements including spotting; remaining focused upon a single point for long as is feasible and returning to that same point on completion of a revolution in order to maintain a static point-of-reference that confirms velocity, directionality and bodily

[35] Harvey Richard Schiffman, *Sensation and Perception: An Integrated Approach*, 5th edn (New York: Wiley, 2001), p. 403.

balance. With no forewarning of the artificial spin performed cinematographically in *The Collector*, the momentary destabilisation of the visual and vestibular systems, despite the fact that this kind of simultaneous movement through the transverse and sagittal planes would be incredibly difficult to physically replicate, creates an instant of disorientation. As vision is used to supplement the inaccurate vestibular sensations this scene is able to induce a temporary feeling of dizziness or disorientation while the viewer's physiology attempts to reconcile the incongruent information.

This emphasis upon movement and the perplexing effects that counterintuitive visual motion can have upon the body enhances the tension and brings the viewing experience that much closer to the internal, interoceptive human senses. The integration of the vestibular sense anchors the viewing experience not only to the conceptual human body but to the specific body of each viewer so that watching becomes a distinctly embodied experience that is reliant upon the specificities of its viewers' bodies.[36] As Merleau-Ponty claims, 'we can only think the world because we have already experienced it'.[37] This is not to say, however, that without experiencing each and every facet and adaptation of metaphorical balance one cannot apply the schema to new situations. It merely indicates that in order to have a schema of balance one must have experienced some form of physical balance from which a schema can be elaborated.

This vestibular attack provides a moment of sensory overload that signals the onset of bodily violence in the film. When Arkin's vestibular apparatus was functional the visual, audio and emotional stimuli were balanced and stable; when it is no longer functional the stimuli become unbalanced with increased tension and human pain being the result. As Arkin moves from room to room following the

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[36] Horror cinema is by no means unique in its attempts at creating an embodied viewing experience. Arguably, the trajectory of all cinematic technology is converging towards the multisensory – take for example the periodic resurgence of three-dimensional film and its endeavor to 'surround' the viewer with visual action. What this thesis argues for is a predisposition of horror cinema to 'need' to engage the viewer's body in order to remain effective in its remit. The horror genre's primary concern with the human body seems in part to direct the course of the genre to either the bodies onscreen, which have, by now, been subjected to myriad tortures and mutations, or the bodies in the auditorium. Technological capability has made the latter increasingly accessible and this has generated what might be considered the 'optimal conditions' for the incorporation of the viewer's body into visual fiction of this type.

[37] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'The Primacy of Perception and its Philosophical Consequences', trans. by James M. Edie, in *The Primacy of Perception*, ed. by James M. Edie (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), pp. 12-43 (p. 17).

attack, for example, the camera work could pursue him in a linear and continuous track or through editing shot-reverse shot sequences together. Instead of these conventional options the scene transitions from room to room by way of the aerial roll.[38] Not only does this technique once again display cross sections through structural walls but it also rotates through both the horizontal and vertical axes so that when the camera rests the scene presented is inverted. Such elaborate and physically impossible movement creates a sense of disorientation that mimics the effects of the loss of vestibular function. When the vestibular apparatus malfunctions the effects can be akin to vertigo, a visual illusion of movement produced by a disparity between two sensory modalities.

The final scenes of the film exemplify the ambiguous connotations of disorientating sensory manipulation, both inter- and extra-diegetically. Arkin appears to outwit The Collector and rescue the young daughter of the household. Having ensured the girl is in the hands of the police, Arkin is loaded into an ambulance and taken to hospital. As the ambulance leaves the property the scene cuts to an extreme close up of a spider that recalls the earlier scene and the subtle implications of both natural order and physical otherness. Earlier, the spider suggested a creeping threat to suburban life and this extreme close up provides an increased iteration of this feeling of impending violence. The spider is fragmented by the computer-generated zoom that focuses upon its multiple eyes, at once highlighting its innate difference from human norms and its perceived prescience in the heralding of instability. As if to confirm the viewer's growing sense of anticipation this shot is closely followed by one of the most disorienting scenes in the film. As the ambulance takes Arkin to the hospital it collides with something unseen and is forced off the road, rolling multiple times. Rather than using the motion of the camera to approximate the roll, the camera remains static in the centre of the screen. Adopting an objective point-of-view shot,

[38] The combination of ears, spiral camera movements and American suburbia again recalls the imagery in *Blue Velvet* (1986). In Lynch's film, the camera's zoom and spiral into the insect-laden severed ear that Jeffrey Beaumont discovers in a field becomes a metaphor for a journey into the 'inside' or unconscious of his hometown. Underneath the surface, suburban bliss in *Blue Velvet* is punctuated with dysfunction and neuroses. Similarly, in *The Collector*, the villain disrupts the serenity of suburbia but the human body is also questioned by the consistent juxtaposition of the human and insect that speculates how similar they may be underneath the superficial exterior.

the ambulance and its contents rotate in front of the stationary camera so that the visual field appears to tumble around the viewer (Figure 2.10).[39]

Figure 2.10: Gravitational Manipulation, *The Collector*

The sense of disorientation is generated by the sensory contrast between the viewer's stasis and the implied alteration of gravitational force as the visual field rotates around the central axis. The vestibular apparatus of the viewer is sensing immobility as there is no direct stimulation of the vestibular sacs or canals but the eye is 'seeing' mobility in the violent effects of gravity as the ambulance rolls. The incongruence between the vestibular and visual information creates a subtle effect that is much like the sensation of movement that can be generated by other visual illusions, including Cine360's *trompe l'oeil*. It is due to the principal illusion of self-vection that this phenomenon is generated. 'We normally see the total scene move only when *we* are actually moving

[39] With a relatively low budget of $3 million (compared to *Saw III*'s $10 million, for example), this effect was achieved by mounting an ambulance chassis onto large steel wheels and physically spinning it around an axis. Shots of the spinning chassis were then cut together with shots of the exterior of a miniature ambulance to create a convincing approximation of the full-sized vehicle rolling over.

relative to a stationary environment' and so significant shifts in the visual field – particularly in an environment that limits that visual field, like cinema or Cine360 – readily lend themselves to the creation of visual illusions that manipulate the viewer's sense of kinesis.[40] If a significant shift in the visual field occurs, the brain autonomously attributes movement to the individual, despite a lack of vestibular corroboration. Consequently, presenting the rolling motion of the ambulance in such a manner manipulates the viewer's sense of gravity and orientation and contributes to a subtle and temporary illusion that the viewer is somehow following the rotation of the ambulance. Indeed, if the viewer were actually spinning the effects on the visual field would be remarkably similar to those represented onscreen. The disorientation created by the temporary spinning sensation embodied by this scene is followed in the narrative by the reappearance of The Collector, once again aligning imbalance with violence and life-threatening events. The Collector re-captures Arkin and imprisons him in an ornamental box as inter-diegetic vestibular motion disturbs the narrative balance and signals a return to distress.

The embodied experience of balance, structured by a bilaterally symmetrical body, enables humans to form an expansive metaphorical concept of *balance* that can be extended beyond the boundaries of the physical human body. Thus from the basic physical experience of balance a metaphorical schema is constructed which is both direct and specific enough to be communicable and yet flexible enough to be extended and applied to instances where the physical experience of balance may not directly apply. Analysis of *The Collector* has shown that this comprehensive schema can be manipulated visually and audibly at both an inter- and extra-diegetic level. Extra-diegetically, the prevalence of the images of animals and architecture that share the same type of symmetry coupled with consonant and steadily rhythmic musical accompaniment can create a sense of ordinariness. A proliferation of this type of imagery, however, is also a precursor to instability and imbalance. Inter-diegetically, camerawork that combines computer-generated images with traditional handheld, Steadicam, aerial and crane-based cinematography, can manipulate the field of vision in order to present incongruent visual and vestibular information. Of particular

[40] Schiffman, p. 404. It is pertinent to note that *The Collector* and Neil Marshall's *The Descent* (2005) are among a minority of films discussed in this thesis that had larger-scale cinematic releases. The environment of the cinema auditorium provides the optimum conditions for visual-vestibular manipulation as the big screen literally takes over the visual field of its viewers.

interest in *The Collector* are the movements that can be emulated by combinations of these technologies. By integrating the tracking Steadicam with crane-based technology the sweeping movements of characters can be replicated by the omniscient point-of-view shot of the camera.

The fact that the cinematography of *The Collector* has such a specific function adds an embodied dimension to the way in which the viewer can interact with the film and thus problematizes its 'torture porn' label. Rather than simply visualising scenes of gratuitous violence to the extent that 'the spectacle of violence – the pornographication of torture, in other words – exceeds what is necessary to convey the meaning of the action in the narrative context', the stylised camerawork assists in the communication of sensations that are typically difficult to express.[41] Terror, pain, disorientation and fear are physiological states that, despite having corresponding signifiers in both the verbal and visual domains – the wound, for instance, symbolically represents pain when that sensation cannot be shared between two individuals – can only be adequately communicated through combinations of sensory stimuli that approximate the original sensation. The embodied appeal to the viewer's sense of balance enhances and amplifies the affective nature of viewership by allowing multisensory engagement with the film. It is not the images of suffering that are 'the point' of *The Collector*, but the way in which those images can make contact with and directly affect the viewer. This is not a case of visual fascination, implied by the pornographic label, but of a *bodily* fascination that is engendered through vision.

It is prudent to note, however, that direct vestibular stimulation, whether inter- or extra-diegetic rarely appears without also being associated with the metaphorical concept of balance. The camerawork of *The Collector* directly stimulates the viewers' sense of balance but is always associated with other aspects of the metaphorical schema, including balance as a positive characteristic and imbalance as a negative one, reinforced of course through classical Hollywood's traditional narrative sequence of equilibrium-disequilibrium-equilibrium. This metaphorical framework is an example of what Mark Johnson terms an orientation schema: one that 'presuppose[s]

[41] Jones, 'The Lexicon of Offence', p. 188.

a "viewpoint" from which the movement is observed'.[42] The physical act of balance that structures our understanding of the schema is necessarily embodied and orientation-based but the metaphorical extensions retain a similar perspective. The experiences of our bodies not only organise the concept but they also influence its application in a metaphorical context. In this way it can be argued that balance is indicative of positivity as it connotes an upright posture, control over one's body and the avoidance of injury. Conversely, imbalance is indicative of negativity as it connotes a lack of control, failure to remain in an adequate position and the potential for harm. Such an association can be seen in *The Collector* with the repeated use of vestibular manipulation immediately prior to the appearance of the villain or the onset of physical pain. The metaphorical applications of balance and positivity are more explicitly manifest in the film to which we shall now turn: Neil Marshall's *The Descent* (2005). Unlike the sometimes bravura cinematography of *The Collector*, Marshall makes use of more conventional techniques to construct a subtle but sustained manipulation of the viewer's metaphorical understanding of balance that does not rely solely upon the explicit manipulation of sensory input but simultaneously invokes and subverts the conceptual understanding of *balance*.

The Appeal to Metaphorical Balance

Neil Marshall's *The Descent* follows protagonist, Sarah, and five friends as they embark on a caving expedition in the Appalachian Mountains. The trip, designed to help Sarah overcome the accidental deaths of her husband and daughter, is endangered when parts of the cave system they are exploring begin to collapse. The group soon realise that they are not alone in the caves and have to battle to find an exit as they are hunted by creatures indigenous to this subterranean setting: the Crawlers. Extra-diegetic manipulation of visual and auditory balance is deployed to contrast the world above ground with the one below by exploiting viewers' associations of balance as positive and imbalance as negative.

The first third of the narrative features sweeping scenes of outstanding natural beauty with events set first in the Scottish Highlands and then in the Appalachian

[42] Johnson, *The Body in the Mind*, p. 36.

Mountains. These scenes are dominated by high key lighting and smooth camera pans; the purposeful and sustained movement of the camera is reflected in the choice of subject matter as we first follow a fast flowing river and later the trajectory of a car along a straight road. The use of aerial photography both reflects and enhances the scale of the surrounding wilderness. The indicators of civilisation, such as roads, cars and boats, are visually dwarfed by the expanse of mountainous woodland that seems to contain and overwhelm them. By reducing the signs of human habitation to seemingly insignificant components of a larger whole, the images evoke both a pleasurable awe and a lingering discomfort. The ambivalence initiated by these scenes mirrors that generated by the insects and spiders in *The Collector* as it highlights the concept of natural order whilst subtly repositioning human beings as small, insignificant creatures.

This reduction of the human is a factor of what Immanuel Kant labels the sublime. For Kant, the sublime is an ambiguous and almost inexpressible feeling that

> represents all that is great in nature as in turn becoming little; or, to be more exact, it represents our imagination in all its boundlessness, and with it nature, as sinking into insignificance before the ideas of reason, once their adequate presentation is attempted.[43]

Certain environments, for Kant, elicit an awe-like affective state in which the human being, along with their all-encompassing subjective consciousness that appears to structure the world in which it exists, experiences an immediate and embodied reduction of themselves to insignificance. Although instigated by an outside agent, the perception of the sublime is an internal relation in which the individual's sense of reason and scale becomes skewed. The resulting sensation is both overpowering and embodied, uniting the organic existence of the individual with their psychology as both are ousted from the central position of significance in the conception of the phenomenal world. Objects in and of themselves are not bestowed with an inherent quality of the sublime but rather have the quality 'sublime' projected onto them by the viewer. It is thus within the relation between the individual viewing and the thing being viewed that the sublime is generated as a dialectical product of relations in scale, force and power. Forces, as in the conceptualisation of balance, are understood

[43] Kant, p. 105.

by the individual first through bodily experience. In the same way that Julia Kristeva's abject is enabled by the experience of the body, Kant's sublime is built upon the embodied experiences of the individual. As Kant proposes, 'for the beautiful in nature we must seek a ground external to ourselves, but for the sublime one merely in ourselves'.[44] The sublime is a sensation of the complete diminution of the agency of the sentient individual to a composite part of an infinitely wider organic reality: the full and unapologetic (although temporary) reclamation of every facet of our being by the cellular substrate of our existence. An amplification of the moments of bodily sensation that allow our embodied nature to rise into consciousness during the viewing experience, Kant's sublime is the extreme invocation of matter over mind.

While certain environments or objects may elicit the sensation of the sublime, the replication of the corresponding relations in scale and power can be used to simulate ambiguous sensation in film. While in *The Collector* many of the images of nature were short and focused upon the small-scale (insect life) in order to generate a feeling of anxious anticipation, *The Descent* favours the grander scale of the natural world that evokes Kant's sublime. The aerial camerawork and the fluid motion of the camera's actions, reiterated by the purposive and relentless flow of the river that is integrated into the opening sequence, visually represent the scale and power of the setting and create an expectation that the human characters are to be similarly overwhelmed during the film. The viewer does not look upon the film as the sublime, but as a visual recreation of the dynamics of a sublime experience. The relation between the self and the sublime that Kant strives to communicate verbally is embodied – is *within* and *because of* me – and this physiological link allows the concept to be simulated through the body of the viewer.

Another striking feature of the composition of these scenes is the continued utilisation of visual balance, a concept that involves the consideration of a variety of aspects within the field of vision including: the relative location in the plane of orientation, spatial depth, relative size, intrinsic interest, visual isolation and shape of objects, the viewer's prior knowledge of the objects in the field of vision, and

[44] Kant, p. 94.

colour.[45] The two-dimensional planes of orientation referred to here are those primarily associated with bodily experience and object manipulation: the central vertical, central horizontal and intermediary diagonal planes. Thus, a large, red circular object on the right side of the field of vision may balance a large, red circular object on the left. Visual balance is created by the use of scenery that provides copious numbers of horizontal, vertical and diagonal lines. The opening shot details a silhouetted mountainside that adheres to the diagonal axis with trees projecting from it. As the camera follows the flow of the river it adopts an overhead angle to present the rapids as a rather orderly diagonal line rather than opting for a more dramatic eye-line view. In addition to adhering to the dominant axes of orientation these scenes also present characters centrally along both horizontal and vertical axes (see figure 2.11, below). The orderly arrangement of objects along these axes of orientation creates a continuous sense of balance and normality such that although the orientation of the trees opposes that of the road, for example, the changes between horizontal, vertical and diagonal are smooth and visually comfortable for the viewer. It has been noted that human beings have a tendency towards searching for patterns and order in the visual field, as evidenced by the perpetual fascination with the Golden Ratio, and both repetition and pattern are suggestive of order, predictability and stability.

Figure 2.11: Diagonal Preference and Character Centrality, *The Descent* (2005)

The isolation of visual balance is, however, counteracted somewhat by the appeal to the sense of the sublime that is constructed through the connotations of balance and power that are intrinsic to the setting. The alternation that occurs between the comforting balance and the disquieting nature of the image is a matter of scale: when an isolated section of woodland is viewed, as it was at the beginning of *The Collector*, or an insect microcosm is enlarged as in *Blue Velvet*, the repeated visual balance is both stable and familiar. When presented as an aerial shot, however, the

[45] Johnson, *The Body in the Mind*, p. 83.

scale overcomes the familiarity and brings the feeling of diminished agency that characterises the sublime. Despite this subtle foreshadowing of threat, the initial sequence of *The Descent* remains relatively calm, with the foreboding associations of the sublime building implicitly in the expectations of the viewer. The seamless track of the camera is mimicked by the long ascending orchestral overture that plays in a major-key scale. The stringed instruments used for this piece sound the evenly spaced tones legato as one note runs into the next with no intervening silence. The even spacing between each sound becomes attached to the equally even spacing between the axes of orientation that are subtly invoked by the imposing imagery. As a result, the scene gains an overtone of grandeur that at once offers comfort but physically and metaphorically overpowers the human figures that pass through it. This ambivalence, that valorises and reduces the human body in the same moment, is reminiscent of the effect Kant attributes to the sublime whereby,

> the mind feels itself *set in motion* in the representation of the sublime in nature […] This movement, especially in its inception, may be compared with a vibration, i.e. with a rapidly alternating repulsion and attraction produced by one and the same object.[46]

As the sublime is knowable only through the subjective frame of reference of the individual viewing – it requires a ground 'internal to ourselves' – the mind enters into an interpretative process in which it attempts to reconcile the sublime with its knowledge and expectations. This is the motion that Kant speaks of which produces alternate feelings of repulsion – because it does not fit our frame of reference – and attraction – because it is internal, emanating from our conceptualisation of ourselves. The incorporation of metaphorical balance in this opening sequence of *The Descent* combines with the subject material in order to convey to the viewer a sense of both attraction and repulsion, of calmness and foreboding, that mimics both the adrenaline-fuelled extreme sports in which the characters engage and the structure of the horror narrative. The viewer is thus subtly made aware that when violence or imbalance occurs, its nature will be akin to the sublime: attractive and repulsive, exciting and terrifying, and interpreted through an embodied frame of reference.

[46] Kant, p. 107; emphasis added.

Just as the lines created by the landscape, river, trees and roads are orderly and adhere to the major planes of orientation, so too does the position of the characters onscreen denote order and balance. The centrality of human figures in the field of vision is perhaps intuitive: the recognition of a being of the same species gives human bodies a high level of intrinsic interest and their subsequent positioning at the centre of a scene lends them a sense of visual importance. Furthermore, the central positioning of human bodies mirrors the way in which individuals perceive the world around them. The ordinary conceptions of frame balance, however, would seem to imply that centrality is not the only, nor necessarily the most effective way of generating positive associations of characters. In principle, gathering many characters around the centre of the frame could lead to an excess of negative space around the edges that would seemingly unbalance the visual field. Similarly, because the characters do seem 'grouped' at times and, because the majority of characters are not positioned according to the rule of thirds, it is quite noticeable that they gather around the central point of some scenes. Despite their centrality, however, they continue to be overpowered by the scale of the scenery around them. The river rapids collide with and jostle the dinghy in which the women ride; the woodland that surrounds the thin, straight road seems to crowd around the tiny cars that contain the even-smaller human figures. Even as visual and auditory balance is maintained, the imposition of such images begins to question the intrinsic value and importance attached to the human bodies represented, to the extent that the events displayed retain the eerie character of calm waters before the tempest.

This implication comes to fruition in the following scene as Sarah, along with her husband and daughter, is involved in a car accident. The scene leading to the collision is a relatively long one and consists of a series of shot-reverse shot cuts as Sarah speaks to her daughter who is in the back seat of the car. The continuity editing throughout this scene assists in creating a calm, flowing movement from start to finish that mirrors the continuous motion of the car and connects this scene to the previous shots of the Scottish Highlands. Unlike the preceding scenes, however, there is no extra-diegetic soundtrack – with the sounds of Sarah speaking and the quiet hum of the car engine dominating the soundscape. The final shot in the sequence is from the perspective of the daughter whilst the adult faces frame the scene (Figure 2.12, below).

Figure 2.12: Visual Balance and Audio-visual Redirection, *The Descent*

The large profiled faces balance one another in the foreground through their equivalent size, shape, axial positioning and intrinsic interest. The viewer's attention is drawn to the exchange between the two: their voices are the loudest sound at the time and the inherent familiarity of the car engine renders its continuous drone practically inaudible. Additionally, elements of tension between the two adults are introduced as Sarah tells her husband that he seems 'distant'. The viewer is visually and audibly captivated by the exchange between the two faces and it is not until the shrill squealing of brakes is heard that the small, neutrally coloured car in the centre of the frame becomes an important object in the visual field. Due to this deflection of attention from the visual to the auditory, the resulting collision generates a more intense jolt, emphasised by the intrusion of extruded metal through the car's windscreen. As the diegetic sound effects cease immediately following the loud, staccato collision, a non-diegetic musical note takes over the soundscape. The quiet, but continuously sustained $F^{\#}$ contrasts with both the immediately preceding diegetic sounds, which were all lower in pitch and varied, and the previous soundtrack that progressed through the natural notes of the major scale. The semitone note sounded here, and continued in the following scene when Sarah wakes in hospital and learns that her family has died, generates a degree of musical dissonance as it stands out as an imbalanced element amongst a slew of previously evenly spaced musical progressions. As a result of this visual and auditory manipulation the viewer, like the passengers in the car, does not see the collision coming despite it occurring quite explicitly in the centre of the visual field. The audible speech guides the viewer's

visual focus away from the oncoming hazard in the same way that Sarah and her husband refocus their attention away from the road ahead of them.

The use of visual and auditory balance can denote stability, as in the initial calming scenes, and thus detract from the explicit realisation of oncoming instability. Simultaneously, however, this forced repetition across the senses contributes to the anticipation of the loss of balance that is intrinsic to the horror film. The combination of multimodal equilibrium and traumatic events creates an intriguing dynamic in which the trauma that Sarah experiences seems to be lessened. The mise-en-scène and frame composition invoke notions of re-stabilisation and resilience even as intense physical and emotional trauma impinges upon the characters onscreen. In contrast to this narrative optimism, the setting and the composition of many scenes change when the group of friends travel to and descend into the underground cave system. The journey through the Appalachian Mountains is in many ways an uncanny repetition of the Scottish Highland scenery that conveyed balance and equilibrium in its presentation. Unlike the Scottish Highland scenes, however, the musical overture of this journey incorporates lower pitched wind instruments that recall those associated with Native American music. The flute, in particular, bears the low harmonic sounds evoked by the overture used for this journey that seems to emphasise the vast and uninhabited nature of the mountainous terrain. It is notable, however, that although the wind instruments evoke connotations of Native American culture, they are a relatively late addition to tribal music, being incorporated in certain areas as late as the twentieth century.[47] The incorporation of Native American music differentiates this setting from the Scottish Highlands historically and geographically whilst foreshadowing colonial struggles between two people – in this case the human explorers and the hominid Crawlers. The hybridised music, however, suggests not only difference and contention, but similarities as well. As Native American music integrated the instrumentation and principles of Westernised music, traces of one people came to be found in the artefacts of the other, thus eliding the boundary between the two in an uncomfortable manner. The common connection between the explorers and the Crawlers is, of course, the humanoid body that they share. The

[47] Laurel Sercombe, 'Power and Song in Myth Narratives', in *Music of the First Nations: Tradition and Innovation in Native North America*, ed. by Tara Browner (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2009), pp. 34-53 (p. 37).

difference in timbre of the notes sounded, although remaining in a major tonal scale alters the perception of the music from depicting grandeur to generating a sense of foreboding.

This notion of impending hardship is subtly reinforced as the party nears the caving site. An overhead shot shows the road as a thin vertical stripe in the centre of the screen, dwarfed on both sides by the expansive forest, as the two cars travel from the top of the screen to the bottom. The perspective of this shot minimises the visual impact of the cars as they become insignificant against the larger scenery. Moreover, the lower pitch of the music coupled with the downward movement of the vehicle manipulates the viewer's embodied conception of *up*, originating from the *upright* body posture, being a positive attribute and *down* as being negative. The music and visual movement both mimic the eponymous and imminent descent and imply a departure from the balance that has pervaded even the most tragic and disorienting event of the narrative thus far.

Having arrived at the site of their caving expedition the group of friends partially scale a mountain. During the hike, medical student Sam lists a variety of symptoms that could be triggered by the claustrophobic surroundings of the cave including 'visual and aural deterioration'. Given the principal interactions between these two modalities thus far, this acts as both a diegetic warning and an extra-diegetic foreshadowing of the complex relation between the two sensory systems that will be exploited within the film's subsequent scenes. Indeed, the relationship between the visual and auditory fields is often manipulated in these underground scenes in ways that mimic the sensory deterioration the characters may be feeling. In addition to enhancing the communication of inter-diegetic sensations, this manipulation impinges upon the viewer's conceptual schema of balance by the cross-stimulation of the two sensory organs responsible for the achievement and manipulation of bodily balance. The first two images of the underground cave system begin to challenge the primacy of the major bodily axes of orientation by adopting an off-centre positioning of the human figure (Figure 2.13).

Figure 2.13: Off-Centre Positioning of Human Figures Underground, *The Descent*

The first sees Juno descend into the cave ahead of the group. Because of the setting, lighting is limited and low-key with the only source being the previously balanced over-ground world. Juno's physical sensory deprivation is communicated *in situ* to the viewer through the mise-en-scène. As Juno's body replicates the earlier downward trajectory of the vehicle, the negative connotations of falling are once again invoked and the cave becomes a geographical metaphor for the physical and psychological descent into trauma that will inevitably befall the explorers. Additionally, the human figure is once again dwarfed by the scenery and moves vertically downwards just slightly to the right of the central horizontal axis indicating through a subtle visual cue that perceptual and conceptual norms will once again be

skewed. To further enhance the destabilisation of the centrality of the human body, the position of the main light source on the left-hand side of the frame creates an illusion that the human figure is further away from the central axis than is actually the case. Indeed, when Juno lands in the cave, the image features a more pronounced imbalance as she is situated to the far left of the screen with extensive negative space to her right. Above ground the human figure was an agent that balanced the visual scene, either by being situated centrally or by being complemented by another figure along a major axis of balance. Below ground, however, the human figure is off-centre and unable to balance the visual field.

The auditory field also changes between the over-ground and underground sections of the narrative. While the over-ground scenes are permeated by a sweeping string orchestral overture, with wind and brass instruments providing attenuated contrasts to the melodic flow of the major-key notes, underground the musical accompaniment reverts to a piano ensemble that features more percussive instrumentation. The piano and percussive notes are played staccato, a series of short, discrete notes with audible silence in between, and contrast with the legato of the over-ground strings. The musical accompaniment performs a progressive devolution from orchestral sublime to percussive primitivism as the explorers move closer to the Crawlers. The separate intonation of each note in the repeating piano melody creates tension by constructing a rhythmic pulse of alternative noise and silence akin to a heartbeat. The separation of the notes also subtly connotes the isolation of the cavers from the above ground world, its comforting structures of familiarity and eventually from one another. Underneath these more obvious connotations of the change in orchestral sound is the alignment, once again, with traditional Native American music that is heavily dominated by rhythmic percussion. Although this association does speak to notions of difference between two opposing peoples, or in the case of *The Descent* two different creatures, the invocation is so subtle that it manifests as more of a general feeling of impending threat rather than as a colonial subtext.

The piano and percussion repeat a simple two-beat melody consisting of a three-note ascent in the higher pitched treble clef ending on a dissonant semitone that is then inverted in the lower pitched bass clef into a three-note descent concluding on

a similarly dissonant tone.[48] As a result, the melody has a distinctive rise and fall quality with the bass clef repeat adding a more impressive sense of foreboding as the explorers descend further into the darkness. The continued repetition of the melody, coupled with its low volume in comparison to the diegetic sounds, constructs a cyclic and haunting quality that enhances the disruption it creates in the auditory field.

The nature of the physical setting for the underground scenes renders disorientation easy to simulate: a realistic depiction of caves would naturally include low-key, potentially insufficient lighting, a limited field of vision and a predominance of shadows. By limiting the amount of light, the effects of visual deprivation experienced by the characters can be simulated for the viewer. This specific backdrop also creates further opportunities to manipulate the viewer's sense of balance by utilising the contrasting aspects of light and dark to emphasise certain directions of movement. Often, moving objects hold more interest in the visual field than stationary ones, but there is also a mechanism in the ocular neural pathway that allows for preferential perception of movement in specific directions. When stimulated, the optic nerve transmits information to the primary visual cortex and the accessory optic pathway, whilst the accessory optic pathway transmits information to the lateral and dorsal terminal nuclei and back to the primary visual cortex.[49] It is along this second accessory pathway that 'neurons [are found to] respond to visual movements in preferred directions aligned along the planes of the semicircular canals'.[50] As we have already seen, the canals are orientated along the horizontal, vertical and sagittal planes of the human body and, due to the existence of the direction-specific neurons in the accessory optic pathway, perceived movement along these axes carries a higher level of significance than movement in other directions.

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[48] Traditional Native American music not only does not feature the piano but also makes use of various scales that depart from the heptatonic major and minor scales of Western music. Bi-, tri-, tetra- and pentatonic scales are more common in traditional tribal music but this is not replicated here. Milagros Agostini Quesada, Dale A. Olsen and Amanda C. Soto, 'Music of Latin American and the Caribbean', in *Multicultural Perspectives in Music Education,* Volume 1, ed. by William M. Anderson and Patricia Shehan Campbell (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), pp. 79-112 (p. 81).

[49] Carlson, p. 152. It should be noted that there are several pathways of nerve activity originating from the retina and projecting into several areas of the brain for processing and integration. The examples described above form only two of these pathways.

[50] Berthoz, p. 64.

Movement along certain axes can be coded as either positive or negative and this is evident in a scene from *The Descent* in which a tunnel collapses around the group of women (Figure 2.14). Following her friends through the claustrophobic tunnel, Sarah becomes trapped and begins to panic. The camera is positioned at the end of the tunnel looking up to where Sarah's light can be seen. The angle of incline is steep enough to deviate from the sagittal axis of movement, but not enough to be considered vertical and the only visible aspects of the scene are Sarah's light and the immediate rocks surrounding her. In addition to this visual restriction, the underground setting dictates that both character and viewer have no point of reference from which to determine the actual direction of travel: although this scene appears to be angled downwards, remaining congruent with the thematic of descent, directionality could easily be upwards or indeed sideways with no up/down bias at all. This creates an unbalanced image, as the visual weight of the human figure impresses upon the empty space below it. As Sarah panics the camera almost imperceptibly rotates to the right in a manoeuvre that emphasises the claustrophobic nature of the situation and changes the angle of incline resulting in the illusion of the visual field tightening around the human figure. The tunnel begins to collapse around her, the walls literally closing in and the sound ratio between diegetic speech and extra-diegetic music switches; the speech lowers in both tone and volume while the music increases in volume. This dip in inter-diegetic volume mimics the loss of resonance that would be initiated by the tunnel becoming smaller and further enhances the sense of isolation and trauma.

Figure 2.14: Tunnel Collapse with Steeply Angled Perspective, *The Descent*

Sarah finally advances down the tunnel and toward the camera, her relative position on the screen not altering as she remains in an off-centre and steeply diagonal position. The visual balance of the scene does not change until she exits the tunnel and is immediately situated to the bottom-left corner of the screen. While she remains out of balance in the following shot she is no longer in the immediate danger signified by the deviation from the major axes of orientation. The use of steep diagonals to indicate imbalance or instability is contrasted with a scene at the end of the film when in order to escape the caves Sarah must scale a mound of skeletal remains by following a perfect corner to corner diagonal (Figure 2.15).

Figure 2.15: Perfect Diagonal Ascent Through the Centre of the Frame, *The Descent*

This trajectory conforms to one of the major planes of visual balance and also enables the human figure to pass through the central point of the screen. When considering the axes of balance of a visual field one considers the horizontal, vertical and diagonal lines that divide the field into even proportions and intersect through the centre. This central point becomes the locus of visual balance and importance: thus, above ground figures presented centrally were both balanced and important to the narrative. Below ground, however, human figures cannot reach the central point; as the camera rotates during the tunnel scene Sarah is unable to reach or pass through the

centre of the screen. It is only when she escapes from the caves at the end of the narrative that visual balance and human primacy are restored as she travels through the central point and back to the world above ground.

Below ground, the composition of the shots is unable to find an appropriate centre of balance: a sense of foreboding is created by scenes that appear to be on the verge of 'falling' because of the visual inequalities within them. Above ground, however, balance is easier to find in the tangible 'real world', even when events are equally as devastating as those that occur in the caves. The choice of lighting effects, camera angles, shot composition and soundtrack enables *The Descent* to embody the disturbance that the characters themselves experience when they are contained within the dark, unknown and profoundly disorienting cave system. Even though the camerawork retains a relatively steady and continuous position, the ways in which visual and aural stimuli interact enable the film to simulate a disquieting imbalance.

On Balance

Our bodily experiences, the physiology of the vestibular apparatus and the planes in which we can move and experiment, structure a range of metaphorical understandings. On a primitive level, our nervous system shapes our bilateral symmetrical bodies and embodied experience and aids in the formation of an equal distribution metaphor of balance that can be appealed to through camerawork and composition. As an extension of this model we conceptualise balance as stability, a positive attribute and as something that can be applied to conceptual spaces such as the visual and auditory fields. Of fundamental importance in the effectiveness of vestibular manipulation in film is the cross-modal stimulation of vision and the auditory sense to approximate the experience of vestibular excitation. The otoliths and endolymph of the semi-circular canals do not sense movement when Arkin's ambulance rolls in *The Collector*, but the visual illusion leads to a momentary perception of movement nonetheless. Similarly, even though directionality is not explicit in *The Descent*, downwards motion is implied whenever danger is close. Indeed, a visual field that is possessed of equality in distribution or relative weight of objects can be balanced and this balanced visual field, like the ones presented initially

in both *The Collector* and *The Descent*, can connote positivity, harmony or safety. Conversely, an unbalanced visual field can serve to heighten tension or intensify fear and apprehension. More often in horror, however, the connotations of balance are coupled with subtly contradictory visual or auditory stimuli – the spider that invades the balanced scenes of domesticity in *The Collector* or the introduction of bass toned music in *The Descent* – to build tension in order to foreshadow an impending loss of balance or stability that is usually accompanied by violence. Vision is thus afforded a proprioceptive and vestibular inflection in these multi-sensorial viewing experiences.

The presentation of events onscreen creates an instant of physical sensation during which the viewer's own 'body [appears] in the focus of attention'.[51] The represented events temporarily recede as the viewer's attention is directed towards the physical experience of watching the film. It is through these moments of physical sensation that balance as a metaphorical concept can be exploited in order to generate or dissipate tension or shock within the viewer. In *The Descent*, the moment of physical sensation that is most prominent, the road accident that begins the narrative, is so disorientating because the balance of the visual field was not disrupted prior to the physical and emotional jolt of the collision. Although less explicit than the found-footage aesthetic at work in *The Poughkeepsie Tapes* and *The Bay*, the manipulations of frame balance and attention achieve a similar affective shock. Following this initial moment of physical sensation, tension and foreboding in the narrative are expressed primarily through imbalance and the descent of human bodies from over-ground to underground – light to dark – civilised to primitive.

Without the physical experience of balance we would be unable to designate rules of composition, or alter the impression of a scene simply by moving elements within the film frame. The very fact of embodiment means that at any given point an individual is bombarded with sensations and perceptions. Consciously, only a small number of these incoming stimuli are attended to with the choice being influenced by biological and cultural factors. Although the nature of embodiment is not often the focus of consciousness, 'meaning is happening without our knowing it' with attention being directed at perceptions that are already imbued with significance based upon the

[51] Shaun Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), p. 28.

nature of embodied life.[52] Whilst the manipulations of balance discussed in this chapter rely heavily upon combinations of visual and audible stimuli, film has the ability to initiate a remarkable range of sensory experience. Such experience can manifest formally in the way certain images, objects or actions are depicted, or metaphorically through the manipulation of physiological and social structures of understanding. The following chapter explores the ways in which the lesser-stimulated senses of touch, smell and taste can be powerfully evoked by the contemporary cinema of extreme horror.

[52] Mark Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 17.

Chapter 3 – From the Haptic to the Somatic: *The Human Centipede* (2009) and *The Human Centipede 2* (2011)

I have thus far sought to demonstrate the ways in which contemporary extreme horror embodies Vivian Sobchack's notion that 'a film is an act of seeing that makes itself seen, an act of hearing that makes itself heard, an act of physical and reflective movement that makes itself reflexively felt and understood'.[1] It has been argued that film spectatorship is never merely a case of engaging visually with a pre-constituted narrative, but is instead a multisensory experience that, through an appeal to the human sensorium extending beyond the eye and brain, reincorporates the viewer's body in the creation of a coherent and meaningful sensory experience. This sensory experience – constructed by each individual viewer in the space in which their subjective consciousness and the film contact one another, comingle and form a dynamic consortium of physiological, psychological and social interactions – forms the basis for what the viewer will later come to understand as their 'interpretation' of the film. In the introduction, it was stated that a 'bi-level physical reductionist/reconstructionist hierarchy' would be utilised to address the influence of the physiological body on the viewing process.[2] In this framework, the act of viewing a film finds a correlate to the prevalent scientific theory of mind that states that neural architecture generates the basic conditions of consciousness. Similarly, the viewing process is comprised of distinctive layers of engagement: on a neurobiological level the viewer makes physical contact with the film through the sensory modalities considered in this thesis while on a cognitive level the viewer constructs a coherent interpretation in which they assign personal and sociocultural significance to the actions and events depicted onscreen. These levels of engagement are not independent but are tightly correlated with one another. Physiological interaction with the film, which incorporates the viewer's current and previous embodied experience, influences the subsequent interpretation of the film through structures of understanding that encode bodily experience in cognitive concepts. We have already seen, for example, that our experience of balance results in extensive metaphorical understandings of the significance of *up* and *upright* as associated with success,

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[1] Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 3.
[2] Randall C. O'Reilly and Yuka Munakata, *Computational Exploration in Cognitive Neuroscience: Understanding the Mind by Simulating the Brain* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), p. 6.

civilisation, happiness, and positivity. The interpretation of a film, therefore, is never merely 'mind-work' because we cannot think outside of our bodies, or outside of physiological influence. Sensory experience gives birth to cognitive engagement as the cinema makes use of 'modes of embodied existence' and 'structures of direct experience' to influence and guide the viewer.[3] One such mode of cognitive engagement is 'interpretation' – a subjective process of making sense of a biopsychosocial experience.

This thesis has so far delineated a number of senses in order to expose two fundamental facts of sensory experience. Firstly, no sense ever operates in isolation as the sensorium is fundamentally integrated on a cellular and neuronal level. The neurological conditions of agnosia (being unable to recognise an object in one sensory modality, whilst retaining its recognition in others) and synaesthesia (experiencing stimuli of one modality in another, as in hearing middle C and seeing the colour red) demonstrate the capacity for sensorial exchange and mingling across modalities. In terms of film, a similar cross-modal exchange has been explored in the combinations of vision and touch and vision and sound wherein the mingling of multiple modalities results in an embodied and augmented viewing experience that is phenomenologically *more than* the sum of its parts. Secondly, direct sensory experience generates ontological and orientational metaphors that underlie significant cognitive concepts such as balance, containment and even individuality (predicated, of course, on our physiological experience of our bodies *showing us* that we are discontinuous from other people). Having established the foundations for sensory integration in the contemporary horror film, the inquiry must now turn towards the intrinsic connections between the neurobiological sensations of film viewing and the *bio*psychosocial process of interpretation. To this end, the embodied schemata and conceptual metaphors that arise from physiological experience will be explored in more detail, with particular emphasis placed upon the ways in which physiology influences sociocultural significance.

The following discussion will analyse the ways in which *The Human Centipede* (2009) and *The Human Centipede 2* (2011) can be approached through the

[3] Sobchack, p. 4; p. 5.

medium of the human body. It will begin by acknowledging the implications of the embodied viewer to a culture that is principally obsessed with the body. By presenting an extended case study, the ways in which embodied experience – including ontological metaphors (*the body is a container*) and body schemata (inside-outside, whole-part) – can be encoded in contemporary film will be explored. It will then be argued that, having invited viewers to engage bodily with the film, *The Human Centipede* and more explicitly *The Human Centipede 2* utilises a specific combination of extreme subject matter, cultural metaphor and somatic image to stimulate the senses of touch, smell and taste. Finally, the effects of engaging the viewer in such a bodily fashion will be considered as the principal generator of anxiety that resituates body horror from the bodies onscreen to the dynamic bodies that experience, rather than simply view, the material before them.

The All-Consuming Sensorium

As we have seen above, the physiological relation between the film and its viewer is one that has been explored in the phenomenological inquiries of Laura U. Marks. Marks' framework for haptic visuality emphasises the contact between the viewing body and the object viewed as she approaches spectatorship as an interaction between two bodies. Marks writes that 'in a haptic relationship our self rushes up to the surface to interact with another surface' and 'we cannot help but be changed in the process of interacting'.[4] In the haptic mode, a viewer approaches a film in the same manner they approach any other object and the sensuous experience of the film – accessed through the eyes that are so intimately connected, proximally, chemically and neurologically to every sensory modality and nerve fibre of the human body – produces a reaction, an exploration of a phenomenon by a perceptive creature. It is a different mode of engaging with film that incorporates and transcends 'viewing', thus representing a sustained turn towards the visceral. This is not an attempt, however, to marginalise the dynamics of spectatorship that have already been explored in relation to cinema, merely an argument for recognising that underlying those dynamics is a set of primal structures of experience and comprehension. Indeed, Marks notes that 'the haptic image usually occurs in a dialectical relationship with the optical' in the same

[4] Laura U. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. xvi.

way in which the two terms of a binary opposition define one another as much as themselves.[5] Spectatorship engages us on a viewing continuum as the viewer transitions somatically between engaging with the narrative, or the 'meaning' of a film, and the sensory qualities of making contact with that film. Such somatic transitions, however, necessarily affect the viewer's subsequent conscious engagement with film as the conscious and somatic realms mingle in a malleable spectrum of embodied experience.

The preceding chapters have contended that vision is the gateway to bodily sensations in contemporary film and that visual engagement cannot, therefore, be analysed in isolation from the wider sensorium. Indeed, no single sense modality is truly isolated and even sensations we perceive as being wholly within a single sensory remit have, in fact, multiple sensory components. Balance, for example, is comprised of interoceptive, proprioceptive and visual stimuli that combine in ways that can be perceived as comprehensible by the individual being stimulated. Similarly, the conditions of agnosia and synaesthesia (which are both physiological conditions) suggest that the senses are not as distinct or as rigid as one may like to think. Physiological studies have demonstrated that the neurons and cortices of the brain are, to a certain extent, flexible in the reception and reporting of sensory stimuli.[6] Analysis of *Gut* and *The Poughkeepsie Tapes* explored the ways in which vision can allow access to the sense of touch, both formally and metaphorically. Laura U. Marks' adoption and development of the notion of haptic visuality demonstrates that a different way of looking at an image can open that image to the realm of visceral experience. Similarly, the incorporation of balance as both a physical sensation and a metaphorical concept in *The Collector* and *The Descent* highlights the ways in which visual perception can be augmented by the interactions of a secondary sensory modality.

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[5] Marks, *Touch*, p. 12.

[6] Christine Métin and Douglas O. Frost ('Visual Responses of Neurons in Somatosensory Cortex of Hamsters with Experimentally Induced Retinal Projections to Somatosensory Thalamus', *PNAS*, 86 (1989), 357-361) and Mriganka Sur, Preston E. Garraghty and Anna W. Roe ('Experimentally Induced Visual Projections into Auditory Thalamus and Cortex', *Science*, 242 (1989), 1437-1441) show that foetal re-routing of visual and auditory cortices leads to each developing some features of the other. The nerve fibres and neural tissue are effectively unspecialised until they are primed and assigned to a specific sensory modality shortly before birth. C.U.M. Smith, *Biology of Sensory Systems* (Chichester: Wiley, 2000), p. 29.

The very concept of a 'turn towards the visceral' directs the viewer and the critic alike to the physiological dimension of the human body as it invokes the innards: intestines, stomach, mastication and the distinctly viscous, wet textures of the innermost parts of the organic body. Rarefied in horror film through the thematic of cannibalism – *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980), *Blood Diner* (1987), *Parents* (1989), *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) and its sequels and spin-off television series, *Sweeny Todd* (2007) and *The Green Inferno* (2013) – and more subtly (but no less horrifically) in the narratives of consumption engendered by Cheol-su Park's *301/302* (1995) and Brett Leonard's *Feed* (2005), human consumption retains an element of fascination. The horror genre's commentary upon consumption, in its correct and incorrect forms, perhaps finds it main course in Tom Six's *The Human Centipede* (2009). Six's premise is startlingly simple: a generically constructed mad scientist, Dr. Heiter, becomes obsessed with surgically connecting human beings together, anus to mouth, in a grotesque centipede operation. He captures four hostages – later discarding a German truck driver in favour of the physically more suitable Japanese tourist, Katsuro – performs his operation and then attempts to successfully spend his life with his new 'pet'. Deliberately conflating consumption with a species of cannibalism, the faecally fascinated film constructs a discourse of nausea that offers a metaphorical commentary upon consumption, proper, and the other kind of consumption invoked by the film's satirical unveiling of the execrable aspects of organic human existence: capitalist consumer culture.[7]

It is perhaps pertinent that the two bodies Heiter selects to be the recipient segments of the centipede are American tourists, Jenny and Lindsay. Paradigmatic stereotypes of American consumer culture, the immaculately groomed duo display what can only be described as a stunning lack of self-awareness – and horror film tropes – as they travel through Europe 'consuming' the alternative cultures. In an

[7] The link between the two modes of consumption exposes the symbiotic relationship between the physiological world and the psychosocial one. Consumer culture is, at heart, based upon the needs of the human animal – the need to eat, drink, be safe from predation, reproduce and provide for the offspring. Although intensely augmented, even mutated, from the evolutionary imperatives for survival, the cyclic consumerism that dominates nevertheless incorporates the generation of a 'need' (which is no longer a 'need' but a desire packaged as such 'false needs') followed by the provision of goods and services to satisfy it. Cinema is undoubtedly a commodity produced to satisfy a set of interlinked 'needs' but the identification of these needs and the analysis of the ways in which they are satisfied by contemporary horror cinema is not within the scope of this thesis. Instead, this project seeks to establish that in the satisfaction of the cinematic need(s), contemporary film increasingly strives to incorporate the viewer's bodily sensation to heighten the viewing experience.

echo of Eli Roth's *Hostel* (2005), the girls reveal to their absent friend that they have met a 'cute German waiter' who invites them to a party located somewhere deep inside the German countryside, miles from any town. Although Jenny and Lindsay avoid *becoming* commodities in the vein of Roth's metanarrative, they embody the same hedonistic, hungry consumer culture as Paxton and his associates. They devour the cultures of the world and, regrettably for them, quite a lot more besides.

Jenny and Lindsay are products of a culture of appearances – indicated by their revealing attire, their hiring of an executive grade BMW with alloy wheels to drive through woodland and their trust of the German waiter based upon the scale of his 'cuteness' – that can be viewed as a by-product of what Guy Debord addresses as the society of the spectacle. The spectacle is an image, an appearance, which holds value in a capitalist culture because of what it represents. The image that Jenny and Lindsay proffer (albeit satirically) is that of the desirable feminine as constructed by Western culture: airheaded, naïve, beautiful and exceptionally well-presented they are the quintessential, unthreatening and easily controlled 'trophy wives'. That stereotypical image, however, transcends the mere physical presence of either character onscreen; they are representations of an ideal mobilised by Tom Six in order to create a specific dynamic within the film. The transcendence of the representation over the object being represented is a key function of spectacle as 'appearance becomes just as important – and practically more so – than the [represented object's] being itself'.[8] The stereotypical image of the American consumer has a certain cultural (and literal, in *Hostel*) capital. The spectacle, in Debord's words, 'is *capital* accumulated to the point where it becomes image'.[9]

The ideology of consumption is threaded through the eye of the spectacle's needle in both its relation to the practice of film viewing and the wider visual culture. That visual culture is an important sociocultural industry exposes the significance that images, and the technologies (mechanical and social) that produce them, carry. The rise of the spectacle has been accompanied by what Jonathan Beller terms a 'cinematization of the visual' as social relations become evermore attuned to the

[8] Wolfgang Fritz Haug, *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics*, trans. by Robert Bock (Cambridge: Polity, 1986), p. 17.
[9] Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone, 1995), p. 24.

value and exchange of the image in a way that mimics the mechanics of cinema.[10] A brief scoping of contemporary society reveals unparalleled use of the image as a force driving the propagation of mass consumption: advertising, mass media coverage, healthcare, wellbeing movements, cosmetics, fashion, enhancement surgery and medicine all communicate with their consumers through the image. The image of the healthy body, attractive body, successful body, wealthy body and the anatomically perfect body permeates the social environment like a spectre. Its presence remains spectral because, ultimately, this body that envelops contemporary culture is not a body at all.

Society surrounds its inhabitants with images of bodies and yet these images refer us not to *the body*, but to a set of cogent societal norms that are reiterated and upheld through the reproduction of these spectacular un-bodies. Indeed, as Marzena Kubisz recognises, the emphasis upon the image of the body, and the perfection of that image, has resulted in 'the human body [being] fragmented and prepared for the exchanging of imperfect parts'.[11] The result is that the body *proper* recedes from consciousness even as it remains firmly within 'sight'. The irony in this dynamic is, of course, that the physical body is the lynchpin of all human experiences and it is this quality that allows it to be so malleable. Cross-culturally, the human body is a universal factor in the shaping of experience and understanding: it is 'because every individual in a society has a physical body and because the education of that body can begin from babyhood (if not before) [that] the body (that is the socialized body) is *the* fundamental and universal guide by which human beings understand that they are social beings'.[12] Moreover, it is because every person has a body and shares the experiences of that body that images of the body are open to such diverse and fluid significations. Only something so undeniably immediate could wield such intrinsic and adaptable power over so many different societies.

A paradoxical situation thus arises: although socially, medically and technologically we 'now have the means to exert an unprecedented degree of control

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[10] Jonathan Beller, *The Cinematic Mode of Production: Attention Economy and the Society of the Spectacle* (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2006), p. 2.
[11] Marzena Kubisz, *Strategies of Resistance* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2003), p. 16.
[12] Ted Polhemus, 'Social Bodies', in *The Body as A Medium of Expression*, ed. by Jonathan Benthall and Ted Polhemus (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1975), pp. 13-35 (p. 31).

over bodies […] we are also living in an age which has thrown into radical doubt our knowledge of what bodies are and how we should control them'.[13] The complexities of the paradox replicate the multifarious nature of phenomenal experience as physiological existence facilitates the extrapolation of the body from a physical entity to a psychosocial symbol. To take a social constructionist outlook, the body 'is named as a theoretical space' that is constructed socially and can thus be reconstructed as required.[14] Images of the body are layered: on the one hand, they represent a reproduction of a specific body; while on the other they represent a reconstruction of a social imperative. The changing shape of femininity, for example, denotes the physiological trends in a given population along with the social trends towards specific features or attributes. Crucially, however, it is the reconstruction of social imperatives within images of the body that takes precedence as the body proper becomes subsumed by the potential symbolism of the spectacular image. There is, it seems, an emergent ambiguity within the culture of the body. For film, this manifests in medical horror (Joel Schumacher's *Flatliners* (1990) and Jen and Sylvia Soska's *American Mary* (2012)) and the so-called 'torture porn' cycle of films, which question the limitations of material existence. As medical and technological developments extend, curtail and alter the limits of the human body, the question of what it means to be embodied comes under scrutiny. In this respect, body horror is perhaps the most apt genre to engender a physiological return to bodily experience as it mobilises the privileged sense of consumer culture (vision) and reopens the channels of communication between the other senses and the conscious mind. Consumption in contemporary cinema is being reconnected with the physiological imperatives that underpin the psychosocial realm of experience.

In her considerations of the haptic mode of viewing, Laura Marks claims that 'the more general desire to make images that appeal explicitly to the viewer's body as a whole, seem[s] to express a cultural dissatisfaction with the limits of visuality'.[15] This assessment insinuates that the turn towards the viscerally somatic image – an image that reunites the internal viscera with the externally facing surfaces and organs of the viewing body – denotes a deliberate change in the stylisation of

[13] Chris Shilling, *The Body and Social Theory*, 2nd edn (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2003), p. 3.
[14] Shilling, p. 9.
[15] Marks, *Touch*, p. 4.

cinematographic technique, and that this change occurs in response to a widespread dissatisfaction or lack. The incorporation of the human body in the viewing experience is undoubtedly a sustained trope within contemporary extreme cinema and this would indeed suggest a requirement for that change.[16] It is not as simple, however, to link the somatic nature of contemporary film directly and only to dissatisfaction with vision as Marks herself notes that the visual and haptic image work in concert. The haptic is not a denial of the visual but a development of it, which does not suggest dissatisfaction so much as a desire to reach past the current mode of spectatorship and evolve the way in which we experience film.

The evolution of the way in which images are presented to the viewer can be identified in the so-called 'MTV aesthetic', discussed in the previous chapter, that promotes rapid-fire cuts and editing techniques, incongruent or counterintuitive sensory pairings and manipulations of sensory simultaneity in order to generate a coherently incoherent multisensory experience. No longer defined as simply 'viewing' this experience engages the perceiving body in a dynamic and sometimes contradictory process of meaning *finding*. Moreover, the bodily sensation generated by these films offers something of a remedy to the predominance of the spectacle. If in spectacle culture 'all that once was directly lived has become mere representation', the reinstatement of a direct physiological relation between an image and its viewer becomes a rebuttal of its status as representation.[17] The haptic image is not merely an image: it does not hold the vestige of embodied meaning in a diminished capacity but instead roils grotesquely and incessantly with phenomenological immediacy. Among those films experimenting with embodied images, Tom Six's *The Human Centipede* (2009) and *The Human Centipede 2* (2011) stand out as examples of the disturbing quality of the somatic viewing experience. As Steve Jones notes in an article for *Cine-Excess*, the franchise has been vilified by some critics – spurred by the ban imposed

[16] It should be stressed that, owing to the nature of embodiment and the pervasive influence of the material body upon human experience and cognition, such incorporation of the body into the cinematic experience is not limited to a single genre or subgenre. The argument being advanced in this thesis is that contemporary extreme horror displays a sustained and explicit trend in foregrounding the incorporation of the body into the viewing experience because of its extreme content and its socioeconomic need to attract viewers to the industry. Implicitly, all human experience involves the body (because without a body, nervous system and a brain you cannot experience anything) but this inquiry seeks to focus upon the explicit incorporation and utilisation of embodied experience in cinema.

[17] Debord, p. 12.

upon the uncut sequel – as inherently harmful, either to their viewers or to culture itself. These critics, Jones states, 'present the series as illustrative of declining standards, both in the horror genre and in cinema more broadly'.[18] The implication of these 'declining standards' is, of course, that there is a growing desire among the viewers to watch grand displays of increasingly extreme, socially taboo depravity. It is not the spectacle of decadence, however, that produces the unavoidably visceral reactions elicited by the film and its sequel. Indeed, the artifice of spectacle that can be found in Six's use of stereotypical characterisations, that allows his characters to represent the archetype for which they stand (consumer, mad scientist, foreign other, social reject), is actually the keystone to an altogether more complex interaction between the 'consumers' onscreen, and those in the auditorium. That interaction takes place unavoidably and disturbingly through the manipulation of the viewer's bodily experience and understanding in the form of ontological metaphor and body schemata.

Ontological Metaphor and Body Schemata

Dr. Heiter (Dieter Laser) stands before his three restrained subjects, illuminated by the light of a projector, framed by his own shadow and overlaid with a crude diagram, as he explains the details of their forthcoming medical procedure (Figure 3.1). His thick German accent seems to emphasise the abrupt contours of his markedly square jaw and his sunken cheeks as he reveals himself as a 'master surgeon' with a specialty for separating conjoined twins. To the horror of his captives – American friends Lindsay (Ashley C. Williams) and Jenny (Ashlynn Yennie) and

[18] Steve Jones, 'No Pain, No Gain: Strategic Repulsion and *The Human Centipede*', *Cine-Excess Special Issue: Cult Controversies* (ejournal; n.d) <http://www.cine-excess.co.uk/subverting-the-senses.html>, [accessed 3 July 2014], p. 2. Other critical responses to *The Human Centipede* have adopted a variety of frameworks to interpret the franchise in an effort to account for its seemingly universal ability to repulse and appal. Eugenie Brinkema, for example, delivered a paper at the Film-Philosophy conference (2013, 'Disgust, Shame, Love') outlining Levinas' dynamic of shame as enacted across the three captive bodies of the centipede (abstract available at http://www.film-philosophy.com/conference/index.php/conf/2013/paper/viewPaper/460). Although sustained critical engagement with *The Human Centipede* franchise tends to be polarised, it is most often upheld as marking a significant development/break in contemporary horror. This is due, in no small part, to its use of undeniably emotive content that provokes a sustained reaction in its audience. Yet, as Mark Betz points out, the premise incorporates tropes discovered in earlier examples of extreme cinema – most notably Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Salò, or 120 Days of Sodom* (1975) – in a restatement, rather than a novel envisioning, of the apex of body horror. My investigation hopes to establish that *The Human Centipede*'s infamy is based, in part, on its intrinsically embodied nature. Mark Betz, 'High and Low and In Between', *Screen*, 54 (2013), 495-513.

Japanese tourist Katsuro (Akihiro Kitamura) – he demonstrates with the aid of depersonalised diagrams that he intends to connect the three individual bodies into a hideous Siamese triplet; the eponymous human centipede. Through name, nationality and vocational specialty, Joseph Heiter is a monstrous recreation of the infamous Nazi surgeon, Dr. Josef Mengele.[19] As Heiter stands before his victims dressed in the surgeon's gown the viewer both *sees* the clinical significance of the outfit, reflected in the unnaturally bright lighting, that brings associations of assistance and salvation and *feels* the subversion of these associations through the disturbing invocation of Mengele's 'white angel' façade. The superimposition of the deformed human form over Heiter's chest subtly implies both his deviance as the centipede literally comes from within him and the way in which the signification of the visual image in the film is metaphorically imposed upon the body of the viewer.

Figure 3.1: Dr. Joseph Heiter (Dieter Laser) *The Human Centipede* (2009)

When Lindsay, Jenny and Katsuro see the crude diagram of the proposed body modification the response, despite Katsuro's evident language barrier, is one of terror. One could surmise that the terror originates in the knowledge that anus-mouth connections would necessarily involve coprophagia but the simplicity of the image would suggest a further source of discomfort. Although the digestive tract is drawn in red, highlighting it as a continuous feature of the hybrid creature, the drawing lacks other details such as fingers, toes or facial features. Its simplification of the human body both heightens the horror of the image and foreshadows the loss of dignity and corporeal integrity that the centipede segments will experience. As a result, the diagram invokes a disgust response in both the victims and the cinematic viewer in two ways: firstly, by challenging prevailing body schemata and secondly, by mobilising an emotive metaphor and cultural norms in support of this challenge.

[19] The legacy of Mengele's work in Nazi concentration camps centres around his inhumane experiments on children, including the artificial conjoining of twin siblings. This particular aspect of Mengele's work is hinted at by Heiter when he first meets Jenny and Lindsay and asks, with considerable interest, whether they are relatives. Even Heiter's surname appears to be a combination of the stereotypical Nazi salutatory phrase *Heil Hitler*, firmly aligning the character with the stereotypical image of monstrous science that was first dramatized in Dr. Frankenstein's famous sutures.

Part of the horror of the centipede diagram lies in its defiance of the primary body orientation and schemata human beings have developed based upon their principal mode of embodiment. Shaun Gallagher defines a body schema as 'a system of sensory-motor capacities that function without awareness or the necessity of perceptual monitoring' to facilitate the comprehension and understanding of things or events.[20] They incorporate various parts of the body and brain that are involved in directly sensing and reacting to phenomena, in a structure of understanding that provides a continuous organising function to the milieu of sensory data. From these body schemata we can then extrapolate metaphorical connotations. In the same way that we are able to transmute our physical experience of bilateral symmetry and upright balance into the metaphorical schema of *balance* we are also able to take sensory-motor experience and develop 'perceptual schemata' which are 'the various possible structures that our experience must fit if it is to be coherent and comprehensible'.[21] A body schema is therefore a set of sensory-motor potentialities that bodily experience must conform to in order to make sense. Examples of body schemata include: front-back; part-whole; balance; and, into-out of.[22] These are structured, in part, by the experience of having a cephalised, vertical and locomotive body. From the opening scenes of *The Human Centipede* the dominance of this embodied knowledge is challenged by the overpowering visual presence of horizontal lines and movement that deemphasise the vertical axis.

The opening scene of *The Human Centipede* depicts a busy autobahn, the camera tracking slowly from left to right as the frame is dominated by horizontal lines (Figure 3.2). Visually, the frame remains balanced in three quadrants through the horizontal plane (the sky, the road and the scrubland) and the vertical with the oversized bush on the left of the screen balancing the visually important movement of the vehicles to the right. Whereas frame balance in *The Collector* and *The Descent* accentuated vertical balance between left and right quadrants as both normative and positive, the overwhelming preference for visual balance in this scene remains with the horizontal plane, as evidenced by the preferential positioning of the rectangular

[20] Shaun Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), p. 24.
[21] Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987), p. 21.
[22] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic, 1999), p. 35.

lorry as it moves through the frame. Movement is a visual feature that necessarily and autonomously draws the viewers' attention, perhaps due to the evolutionary significance of being able to identify both moving threats and moving prey.

Figure 3.2: Horizontal Bias in Opening Scenes, *The Human Centipede*

The role of evolutionarily significant physiological changes in response to horror film is something that has received limited attention from research fields, although it has been presumed, particularly in psychological and cognitive approaches to film and media, that basic physiological mechanisms contribute to a fear response in most viewers. Watching horror film does cause some physiological changes: Mian et al. (2003) report increases in white blood cell counts, heart rate and blood pressure in a group of individuals viewing *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974), when compared to a control group sitting quietly in an empty room.[23] Hayashi et al. (2009) similarly report that viewing a psychologically distressing video causes vasoconstriction in the forearm and finger.[24] Crucially, what these types of studies do not attempt to do is relate these physiological changes directly to affective or emotional states. They do not claim, for instance, that the alterations in heart rate cause or conversely are a product of fear; they merely identify the similarities between the physiological and emotional states. On the other hand, psychological research tends to focus on affect above physiology with the emphasis upon subject

[23] Rubina Mian, Graham Shelton-Rayner, Brendan Harkin and Paul Williams, 'Observing a Fictitious Stressful Event: Haematological Changes, Including Circulating Leukocyte Activation', *Stress*, 6 (2003), 41-47.
[24] Naoyuki Hayashi, Nami Someya, Toru Maruyama, Yoshitaka Hirooka, Masako Yamaoka Endo and Yoshiyuki Fukuba, 'Vascular Responses to Fear Induced Stress in Humans', *Physiology and Behaviour*, 98 (2009), 441-6 (p. 445).

self-reporting. Whilst the current project operates from a theoretical standpoint in relation to physiology and cognition, it aims to consider the juncture between the realms of the purely physical and the cognitive, and seeks to highlight the ways in which the two influence and structure one another.[25]

As we saw in chapter two, the vestibular organ of the inner ear is a primary site for the detection of bodily movement that contributes to both the physical experience of balance and the metaphorical schemata of balance. As previously discussed, the accessory optic pathway in the brain possesses neurons that respond specifically to the detection of movement along distinct orientations and this, coupled with the fovea's ability to allow optical pursuit – the tracking of a moving object and the prediction of where that object is moving to – suggests that movement of ourselves and other objects is of great evolutionary significance.[26] As a result, the preferential movement in a frame is likely to engage the viewer's eye in a way that emphasises the direction of that movement. The senses are mingled once more as vision is influenced and directed by the senses of balance and kinesis. Dwarfed by the negative space of the sky above and scrubland below, the movement of the traffic in the opening images of *The Human Centipede* creates a clear horizontal preference that is underscored by the striped appearance of the shot.

The camera then tracks in a horizontal arc and reveals Dr. Heiter's car in a lay-by. Heiter is visibly emotional and smooth camera movements reveal that he is looking at photographs of his dogs. The reproduction of the look through both the camera and the actions of characters onscreen focuses the viewer's attention upon the act of looking in a mechanism reminiscent of the dynamic of spectatorship in *Gut*. We are, once again, looking at looking and analysing Heiter's optical fascination with the photograph. This placid introduction to the principal antagonist, enabled through a moment of displaced emotionality that strikes the seasoned horror viewer as somewhat odd, foreshadows Heiter's discord with conventional notions of humanity as he leaves his emotions in his car before sedating and abducting a human hostage. It

[25] Whilst neurocinematics has begun to rectify this imbalance, the stimulation of higher order processes and sensory areas of the brain by film has not yet received adequate attention. fMRI scans, for example, may be able to show how neurons react to the kind of vestibular stimulation outlined in the previous chapter.

[26] Alain Berthoz, *The Brain's Sense of Movement*, trans. by Giselle Weiss (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 64.

also, however, encourages the viewer to be critical of vision *per se* and particularly of the images that are presented to them. Just as the consistent deep focus shots used in *Gut* encouraged the viewer's eye to explore the extraneous details of each scene, the reproduction of the look through Heiter, the camera and the viewer encourages that viewer (not to mention the film critic) to search for the contradictions within the images. They search for the potential source of Heiter's fetish, for the indications of the horrific that are expected from the title of the film, and for the foreshadowing of Heiter's failure to achieve his goal. This kind of visual scrutiny, as in *Gut* and *The Poughkeepsie Tapes*, offers the viewer an opportunity to engage in a somatic way with the images before them as bodily orientation, movement and vision are subtly combined to create a scene that stealthily reveals many of the building blocks of horror that will be used later in the film. The continuity of the camera movement from right-left and the maintenance of both high key lighting and the subtle horizontal bias allow the presentation of the photographs, which depict three Rottweiler dogs standing nose-to-rump, to flow neatly into the silent narrative. Mirroring the lack of dramatic revelation, the image of the dogs does not generate a feeling of shock or revulsion, does not disrupt the movement of the camera or the flow of the narrative and shows no obvious signs of the abhorrence that is to follow. The dog remains a persistent emblem throughout the narrative, despite being entirely absent onscreen. Throughout the film there are three cuts that show the dog's memorial plaque bearing the inscription *meine leibe 3-hund* (my sweet three-dog). These cuts serve as a recurrent reminder of both Heiter's objective – to create a replacement pet constructed of three human beings – and his failure to perfect a technique for achieving this that does not result in death. In this way, the image of the three-dog becomes both a memory of a failed attempt and a heralding of a future conclusion: Heiter's aim is to recreate the tri-dog but his efforts are already fated to fail.

The persistence of the image of the dog generates a quadrupedal emphasis that develops the horizontal bias created by the movement of the traffic and the panning of the camera in the opening scenes. This alteration in orientation signals a subtle de-evolutionary gesture often invoked in horror that aims to question the embodiment and actions of humans. In *The Collector* the villainous body was aligned with insects in a manner that questioned the perceived differences and similarities between them, whilst in *The Human Centipede* the image of the dog begins to question the hierarchy

often perceived between humans and animals. The symbol of the dog functions on two levels in Six's film. Firstly, it destabilises the rationale of expected human norms and returns the viewer to the corporeal fact of the organic nature of the human body and, secondly, it subtly begins to redistribute sensory importance from the human norm of sight to wider mammalian norms. As an organic entity, the human body is subject to rules of existence and behaviour that originate outside of the conscious mind. Subjective experience dictates that humans perceive themself to be the central force of agency in their perceptible world – it is, after all, *my* life – and that they are in some way elevated or specialised above other humans to a certain extent, and other animals in more obvious ways. As a result, the human body is most often conceived of as a tool or container: it has a boundary, the skin, that separates it from the phenomenal world; it has an interior, the organs and flesh that exist within the skin; and it has an exterior that can only enter into the body through accepted modes of access.[27] Permutations of the *body-as-container* schema include the body as a fortress, impenetrable and unchangeable. The subtle repetition of the quadrupedal orientation in *The Human Centipede* draws the conceptually impenetrable fortress of the human body towards its organic reality: it reminds the viewer that their body is simply one of many possibilities. It is the organic nature of the body that challenges the 'fortress' trope of human conceptualisation as organic entities can be manipulated, deformed and mutated. By invoking the orientation of another body and placing the image of the dog as the ultimate aim of Heiter's endeavours, the human body is de-privileged and remade not as a fortress but as a prison that is controlled by forces outside of the body itself – forces which the film both subtly and not so subtly aligns with consumer capitalism.

The narrative of consumption in *The Human Centipede* functions on two levels: the transmuted parody of consumer culture within the film, and the meta-textual commentary upon cinematic consumption engendered by the film's relationship with the viewer. The former is represented by Jenny and Lindsay, tourists from the largest consumer economy in the world whose desire to experience coalesces with their naivety to place them in a horrifically literal 'consumer' situation. The latter finds its centre within the viewer, as the film subtly undermines its own

[27] Mark Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 141.

interpretation. The Nazi subtext of Six's film has been noted in Heiter's characterisation, and is reinforced by his choice of Japanese and American victims, but the stereotypes of all characters approach parody.

The representation of Heiter gestures towards stereotyping through the limitation of his speech and actions to matters concerning the centipede operation. He is doggedly fixated and narrowly characterised as a caricature of Mengele's absence of humanitarian concern in the pursuance of a distorted scientific ideal. Both Mengele and Heiter strive to transcend the human by overwriting the body but, absurdly, Heiter refuses to acknowledge that his centipede is fated to fail; its death is inevitable. Jenny and Lindsay are ciphers, embodiments of cultural typecasting that find antecedents in *Hostel* and *Cannibal Holocaust*. Katsuro too, is a stereotyped spectre of Samurai culture that begins his captivity proclaiming 'the Japanese possess unbelievable strength when backed into a corner' but ends by committing suicide. His attempt at the honourable *seppuku* of the Samurai is nevertheless diluted by his enactment of the female equivalent, *jigai*, intended to dispel an already-present dishonour from the family lineage. The characters are so stereotypical that they parody their own stereotypies through their facetious natures. The purposefully clumsy and facile characterisation becomes increasingly reflexive, as the redundancy of the characters (and Heiter's obsession) becomes apparent. The purpose of the characters (to die) is handed to the viewer in a manner that presupposes the purpose of the viewer (to watch them die). Heiter's centipede becomes an allegorical satire of Six's viewers who 'consume' a repackaged representation of their own acts of consumption.

Srdjan Spasojevic's *A Serbian Film* (2010) shares this particular brand of reflexive black humour and can be considered alongside Six's films as paradigmatic examples of extreme horror. Spasojevic's controversial title – a veritable centipede constructed from the Siamese triplet of horror, pornography and postmodern black comedy – endlessly reproduces the mechanics of vision through its film-within-a-film within the context of another film structure. Aging porn star Milos is convinced to act in one more X-rated feature by the entrepreneurial Vukmir. Given no details about plot, script or events, and simply told to arrive at an address at a given time, Milos becomes simultaneously the actor and viewer of a private show that culminates in a

crescendo of sex and death.[28] The satirical amplification of vision recalls the subtler questioning of visual legitimacy in *The Poughkeepsie Tapes* that engendered semantic slippage between the categories of news reporting, documentary and feature film. In *A Serbian Film*, the mechanics of vision are repeatedly emphasised by the presence of cameras and the manipulation of particular scenes and events by the inter-diegetic film crew that seek to capture a very specific type of film (as indeed, do the extra-diegetic film crew). Spasojevic's house of mirrors is almost painful in its visual confusion: in one scene the external viewer watches a recording of a film crew making a recording of Milos watching a young girl being filmed watching her mother perform fellatio. The persistent framing of vision emulates the disjointed texture of *The Poughkeepsie Tapes*, as each successive construction of vision is undermined by the breakdown of the visual premise of the medium. With *A Serbian Film*, as with *The Human Centipede*, we are viewing the act of viewing through the cinematic medium. In both films, the interior and exterior 'consumers' are conflated by the satire of vision and consumption constructed by the narratives.

The culmination of *A Serbian Film*'s questioning of vision is a scene described by Adam Carey as the film's 'most harrowing [which] depicts a baby being raped just moments after it is born'.[29] The magnification of vision, however, results in the implication, rather than the depiction of this depraved act. The section in question is a film-within-a-film as, following an anticipatory speech about the lack of morals among the purveyors of extreme pornography, Vukmir shows Milos a short clip of his new venture. A heavily pregnant, naked woman walks over to a bench accompanied

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[28] Spasojevic's film is often approached through a political prism, with its violence being read as an allegory of the metaphorical birthing pains of the Serbian nation. Mark Feathersone and Beth Johnson, for example, employ a Freudian-Lacanian framework to argue that the film represents 'the horror of the Serbian real' in its brutality. Nevertheless, many critics agree with Mojca Kuplen's assessment of the film as 'an outstandingly and constantly disgusting movie'. It is interesting to note that critical engagement with the film has focused upon the political frame – marked by Spasojevic's meta-textual address to the viewer that precedes the DVD version – or the repugnance of the violence, while very little has been made of the amplified and confusing dynamics of the look engendered by the structure of the film. Mark Featherstone and Beth Johnson, '"Ova je Srbija": The Horror of the National Thing in *A Serbian Film*', *Journal for Cultural Research*, 16 (2012), 63-79 (p. 63) (See also Featherstone's article 'Coito Ergo Sum: Serbian Sadism and Global Capitalism in *A Serbian Film*', *Horror Studies*, 4 (2013), 127-41); Mojca Kuplen, 'Disgust and Ugliness: A Kantian Perspective', *Contemporary Aesthetics*, 9 (2011), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.7523862.0009.010>, [accessed 4 July 2014] (e.n. 44).

[29] Adam Carey, 'Political Parable or Perversion?', *The Sunday Morning Herald* (2 July 2011) <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/movies/political-parable-or-perversion-20110701-1gv0n.html>, [accessed 3 July 2014] (para. 7 of 17).

by a man dressed in the attire of a sadomasochistic gimp. The image quality is poor and the lighting is low-key so that the colours of the walls, floor, bench and the woman's skin seem to mingle. She sits upon the bench and assumes the stereotypical position of childbirth and the masked man stands between her legs, largely obscuring the camera's view. Labour is simulated through the woman's archetypical cries and crosscuts to the emerging baby. The scene cuts to Milos, watching in discomfort, and then to Vukmir, smiling in anticipation. At this point, it is assumed that Milos and the external viewer are expecting the same thing, prefaced by Vukmir's arrogant assertion that his clients will watch anything and the extra-diegetic expectation of what Spasojevic's widely censored film offers to its viewer through its notoriety. A disturbing wet sound, followed by the wailing of the baby signals the end of the labour as the scene cuts back to Vukmir's clip. The masked man is in the centre of the frame, he is holding something at waist level but we cannot see what and the baby's cries increase in pitch. Its mother smiles before the shot cuts back to Vukmir. The grotesque projectionist grins widely and declares 'newborn porn'. The rape of the baby is implied, but not visualised, through a series of associated crosscuts and the viewer's own expectations. The unseen nature of the apex of violence both harks back to historical horror film, where shot-reverse shot combinations associated Norman Bates' arcing knife with Marion Crane's screaming countenance, and creates ambiguity regarding where this act of vile repugnance originates. A web of inter- and extra-diegetic implication leads the viewer to a specific conclusion that, once reached, is confirmed by a character in the film, but it is the viewer – Milos, the extra-diegetic viewer – that generates the assumption that what is represented here is the rape of a newborn baby. The repugnance of this scene is equally divided between what it is implied to represent, and the thought process of the viewer that acquiesced to that implication. The optical fascination generated by the convoluted structure of the film is thus mobilised against the viewer to complicate and question the relationship between the mediated image and the viewing subject. The superficial characterisation of *The Human Centipede* and the incessant re-framing of vision in *A Serbian Film* result in the image losing depth as it projects itself towards the viewer as a spectral appearance – a imitation of a commodity that, once 'consumed' exposes the viewer's complicity in the cycle of consumption.

Whilst *The Poughkeepsie Tapes* and *Gut* reinforced this de-privileging of

vision through the layering of somatic sensation across the surface of the film, *A Serbian Film* and *The Human Centipede* engender somatic experience through the intricate combinations of formal elements and the contravention of body schemata – most notably the *body as container* and the *into-out of* schemata. These embodied structures of understanding precipitate from the experience of the organic body contained by the skin and accessible only through the 'proper' means. Upon this basis, rules for the use of the human body are tacitly established: objects defined as food enter and leave the body in a particular manner and other objects should never enter the body. *The Human Centipede* replaces food with waste in a manner that simulates sexualised oral obsession, indicated by the anal-oral connections of the centipede and Heiter's joyful shout of 'feed her' when Katsuro eventually defecates. Although not overtly sexual there is nevertheless a deviant sexual desire in Heiter's actions and behaviour.[30] Sexuality is explicit in Spasojevic's film as it repeatedly exchanges the sexual organs for weapons and wounds in its amalgamation of pornography and horror.

Pornography and horror are both unquestionably concerned with bodily arousal and, more specifically, with *opening* the body through the wound or sexual organs. In that respect, the genres enact a partial inversion of the body as they bring the interior biological processes 'out' through the orifices of the skin. In its structure, *A Serbian Film* bears echoes of Michael Findlay's *Snuff* (1976), a faux-snuff picture that sees pornography giving rise to extreme violence in the final scenes. Enacting what Linda Williams identifies as 'a perverse displacement of pornographic hard-core sexual activities […] onto the penetrating violation of the body's very flesh', *Snuff*, *A Serbian Film*, and *The Human Centipede* (albeit in a more subtle fashion) succinctly meld the (sexual) arousal of intercourse with the (bodily) arousal of death in a relation that exemplifies Julia Kristeva's abject.[31] In this dynamic interaction the body engaged in pleasurable sexual stimulation is juxtaposed with that same body's transmutation to corpse, an abjected entity that '*shows me* what I permanently thrust

[30] This sexual desire becomes explicit in Six's *The Human Centipede 2* (2011) as Martin Lomax rapes his monstrous centipede.
[31] Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure and the 'Frenzy of the Visible'* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. 192.

aside in order to live'.[32] In *The Human Centipede* Heiter's anal-oral fixation alludes to a species of organic pleasure garnered from the abject functions of the human body, whilst enacting the transformation of that body into a carcass. Both attractive and repulsive, the body-corpse is an affirmation of the organic nature of existence as it oscillates between life and death, subject and object. As Williams' analysis suggests, the visuality of both pornography and horror generates an optical fascination with the body-corpse and specifically with its orifices (both natural and unnatural) as the site of penetration, sexually between bodies and metaphorically between the states of life and death. Yet this optical fascination is enabled *bodily*, through the implicit and inherent comprehension of the body-as-object and the structures of embodied understanding that permeate both *A Serbian Film* and *The Human Centipede*.

A Serbian Film relies primarily upon the fusion of pornography and horror to open its narrative to the embodied knowledge of its viewer and engages in explicit somatic techniques (found-footage style segmentation of the narrative, abrupt and incoherent crosscuts, and the addition of anempathetic musical accompaniment) only in the last third as Milos recovers his memories through a drug-fuelled haze. *The Human Centipede*, on the other hand, adopts a subtler relation between pornography and horror that enhances the sociocultural implications of Heiter's subversive sexual fascination with an intricate and nuanced array of formal techniques which de-privilege both vision and the primacy of human beings. Vision is denied its violent potential as bandages and sheets cover the sites of horror. The secondary sensory modality of film – audio – is desaturated as a minimalist extra-diegetic soundtrack accompanies the film and emphasis is placed upon inter-diegetic sound effects. Olfaction, the primary canine sense, is incorporated into the narrative through the recurrent image of the dog and the faeces that result from acts of consumption. Finally, the axis of orientation is delicately transmuted from vertical (human) to horizontal (canine). The primacy of the horizontal axis established in the opening scenes is reinforced through the use of perspective so that even when there are human bodies in the frame the viewer's eye is drawn to the opposing orientation.

[32] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 3.

As Heiter enters the basement and wakes his captives (Figure 3.3), his bipedal form is dwarfed by the horizontal perspectives of the two visible walls. The line of hospital gurneys, the beams of the ceiling and the harsh strip lighting all encourage the viewing eye to move horizontally across the image. Heiter himself moves from right to left in accordance with the perspective in this scene and yet his gait is slow as he stops to revive his captives. This pace detracts from the visual primacy usually afforded to human figures onscreen. In addition, the colour saturation decreases Heiter's visibility as his blue shirt and dark trousers mingle with the almost turquoise overlay generated by the green-blue hue of the walls under the fluorescent strip lighting and the deep shadows created by the isolated, top-down lighting arrangement. In this scene, the upright human body is subordinated to the horizontal flow of the frame and Heiter appears as a diminished figure.

Figure 3.3: Heiter's Basement, *The Human Centipede*

Heiter's house, despite being shown explicitly as having two floors, also finds its vertical axes subordinated to its horizontal as the exterior appears as a bungalow of asymmetrical design (Figure 3.4). The small rising dormer to the left, its twin windows taking on the appearance of unblinking eyes, provides an unbalancing effect as the shape of the house vaguely mimics the horizontal shape of the dog. This image, like the autobahn from the opening sequence, appears to be horizontally striped: the sky and trees above, the bungalow in the centre and the shadowed lawn below.

Figure 3.4: The House, *The Human Centipede*

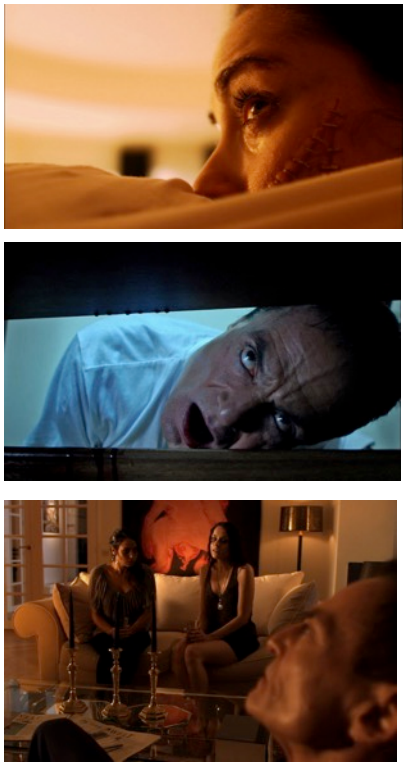
In addition to the visual presentation of lines, the angulation and movement of the camera also emphasises the horizontal orientation. In Hollywood filmmaking the angle that the camera adopts is often used to highlight certain character traits or narrative elements. High-angled shots, like the one used by Hitchcock in *The Birds* (1963) to show the geography of Bodega Bay as the birds descend, typically diminish the perceived power of the subject being looked down on. Conversely, low-angled shots can increase the perceived power of the subject. The basis of this power relation lies within the axes of orientation and the metaphorical understanding that *up is positive*. The bipedal human animal naturally associates 'up' with positivity, power, wellness and accomplishment and 'down' with negativity, illness and ineffectuality.

The inclusion of high and low-angled shots, as well as vertical tilts and pans, within a film subtly reaffirms the primacy of the vertical axis that offers a sense of reassurance. We have seen in *Gut* that the lack of motion in cinematography can create an uneasy stasis in the look of the viewer. Similarly, a continuous absence of dramatic angles can augment the reception of characters and events. Given the extremity of the subject matter one may be excused for assuming that the camera would present, however subtly, a viewpoint that was imbued with an explicitly positive or negative association that would add to the coherence of the narrative and the viewing experience – particularly in light of Heiter's association with Joseph Mengele. John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978), for example, uses the low-angled shot in the climax of the film to demonstrate the power that Michael Myers exerts over Laurie Strode. As Laurie flees through the house the camera looks up the staircase to give a medium close-up of Michael as he listens to her movements.

In *The Human Centipede*, neither Heiter nor his victims are displayed in this subjective way – the majority of shots assume a third-person perspective and are approximate eye-line shots – and when the camera does pan or move it is always through the horizontal axis such that scenes take on the appearance of a panorama. The single pan that moves through the vertical axis comes at the conclusion of the film: as Lindsay is stranded between two corpses and Heiter lays dead by his swimming pool, the camera first moves backwards to view Lindsay through the patio doors, and then upwards, showing the roof of the bungalow and finally the sky. Accompanied only by Lindsay's muffled cries, the upwards trajectory that should finally signal an end to the negative events of the film is more successful in resigning the viewer to the inevitability of Lindsay's death than in suggesting there may be an imminent positive resolution. The lack of point-of-view shots inhibits the identification processes ascribed to the camera by Carol Clover. Clover implicitly accepts the role of the camera in the subjective positioning of the viewer in relation to characters and events when she claims that horror 'is far more victim-identified than the standard view would have it'.[33] As subjective point-of-view shots situate the viewer in relation to characters, the lack of differentiation between the portrayals of each character entails a resistance to this kind of positioning. The viewer's empathic connection to and engagement with the characters is negatively affected by the sustained illusion of impartial objectivity – illusory, of course, because all film is subjectively constructed irrespective of the attempts at objective portrayal the medium can make. This impression reiterates the two-dimensionality of the characters constructed by their stereotypical nature and facilitates the privileging of the horizontal axis achieved by the film through the use of lines, limited camera movements and the human gaze.

[33] Carol Clover, *Men, Women and Chain Saws* (London: BFI, 1992), p. 8.

Figure 3.5: Directional Gazing, *The Human Centipede*



There is 'a certain visual weight' to the gaze of a character that has to be factored into the composition of individual shots in order to achieve a visually balanced image.[34] Because the gaze is assumed to be directed at an object, even when that object is off screen, there has to be sufficient space within the frame for the gaze to rest. Moreover, the direction of that gaze guides the viewer's attention towards the hypothetical object at which the character looks. *The Human Centipede* frequently uses a close-up shot that features a human face in the foreground with the line of their vision extending horizontally through the frame, either from left to right, or extending out of the frame towards the viewer (Figure 3.5). While this type of shot emphasises the eye and the look of the character, it also establishes a hierarchy of space whereby the viewer's own eye is directed towards the point at which the character is looking. The effect of these directional gazes is perhaps most observable in the final image of Figure 3.5. Despite Lindsay and Jenny sitting upright and providing vertical markers that should draw attention, the proximity of Heiter's face to the camera and his disinterested look to the left of the screen re-route the viewer's attention to the horizontal lines of the sofa as their eye follows the trajectory of Heiter's gaze. When the characters gaze towards the viewer, the horizontal axis is implied in the third dimension – they do not look directly up or down but maintain a relatively level gaze out of the frame – and reinforced by the inclusion of strong lines surrounding the face of the character. The centre image of Figure 3.5 shows this bias in an extreme form as an injured Heiter reorients his head between two metal stairs and stares not up, to where his centipede creation has escaped, but out of the screen towards the viewer.

The horizontal orientation dominates the shot composition of *The Human Centipede* even when it is illogical for it to do so. The proposed transition from the

[34] Blain Brown, *Cinematography: Theory and Practice* (London: Focal Press, 2002), p. 44.

norm of bipedal human to the mutated quadruped challenges many primary body schemata. The *front-back* schema is rotated from ventral-dorsal (chest-back) to rostral-caudal (head-rump). The *part-whole* schema is subverted, as a whole person becomes a part of a larger entity. Balance is rotated from vertical to horizontal and the *into-out of* schema, like *part-whole*, is subverted so that what should be outside of the human form becomes inside. Heiter's procedure literally alters the nature of embodiment for his victims in a way that mirrors, albeit horrifically, the film's re-embodiment of the spectator. Meta-textually, director Tom Six engages in a type of sensory play with the viewer as the more explicit the bodily function of the centipede, the more somatically engaged the viewer becomes. Rather than displaying this threat to the human body graphically through explicit images of wounds, surgical incisions, faeces and other effluvia – which would have horrified audiences in the same way that *Hostel* horrifies with its dripping, molten flesh as Kana's eye is burnt with a blowtorch – the threat is instead depicted as something that has already infiltrated the very premise of how the film is constructed. As the victims' lives are threatened, the viewer suffers a destabilisation of body schemata and knowledge through the sense most often considered to report 'reality' to the perceiving body. The viewing experience is uncomfortable not because of the graphic nature of the images presented – indeed there is a surprising lack of viscera for a film that revolves around the human digestive system – but due to the unfamiliar emphasis placed upon orientations and bodies that lie outside of the norms of ordinary human experience.

The lack of graphic imagery in this film is notable because of the deeply disturbing emotional response it is capable of rousing in viewers. Ordinarily, extreme film integrates violence and realistic depictions of blood or viscera into its narratives as they can be easily and quickly related to the viewer's own bodily experience of similar, although markedly less extreme, physical distress. Such graphic images assist in the generation of the emotional response and without them the truly horrific nature of the centipede operation must be communicated through an implicit web of associations and assumptions that the viewer is led towards. In doing so, much of the crude nature of the subject matter is bypassed so that the narrative may focus upon the

disturbing threat to the human body that lies beneath the cultural abhorrence of, and fascination with, faeces.[35]

Emotive Metaphor and Cultural Norms

In addition to the manipulation of body schemata and orientation to challenge the viewer's embodied understanding of their body and the world, *The Human Centipede* also utilises an emotive metaphor based upon the *into-out of* schema in order to generate a feeling of revulsion and disgust. We have seen in the case of the balance schema that primary orientation metaphors are based upon bodily experience. Our conceptual metaphor of *into-out of* is based first upon bodily experience of food, beverages and waste products, and secondly upon the capacity to manipulate objects. In this view, there is a certain type of 'felt meaning' to specific metaphorical concepts so that it might be said that the individual 'cannot have the meaning without the sensed feel of it'.[36] The concept of 'up', for example, relies upon the conditions that the human body be bounded by skin and be superficially solid; that the head and eyes can travel in at least one dimension; and that proprioceptive receptors can relay information about the position of the body in space when the head and eyes move. In such a manner 'up' becomes *that which is above my eyes* and 'down' becomes *that which is below my eyes*. Similarly, propositional indicators such as 'above' and 'below' presuppose an imagined or virtual body around which to orientate themselves: as the metaphors become more complex the relationships can be developed between objects but something can only ever be *above* something else. In relation to the body, because we can put food in and excrete waste out the body as a container metaphor is strengthened.

The image of three individual people, on all fours and bandaged to the person in front of them, compels a certain kind of bodily understanding for the viewer. The posture of the crawling body rekindles the experiences of childhood, of the infancy of the human species, of learning to move and also manifests the feeling of

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[35] In *The Human Centipede 2*, however, the crude nature of the coprophagy trope is embraced in its entirety creating a contrast between the subtle terror of the first film and the crescendo of disgust found in the sequel.

[36] Eugene Gendlin, *Experiencing and the Creation of Meaning: A Philosophical and Psychological Approach to the Subjective* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1997), p. 67.

unnaturalness that has gradually been accumulating through the combination of the image of the dog, the horizontal bias and the uneasy fusion of pseudo-sexual fetish and horror within the film. The familiarity of the posture is made uncanny by its enforced nature and the unseen connections to the person in front. The bandages that cover the anal and genital area of each centipede segment obscure the site of horror yet reinforce it through associations of incontinence that render coprophagia an inevitability. The viewer is terrorised by the many connotations of this image: physical incapacitation, incarceration, bodily helplessness and physical infirmity are all implied alongside the culturally abhorrent notion of being force-fed faeces. Meaning emerges from the body as well as from the conscious mind of an individual. Metaphorical associations based upon physical experience, like the neurophysiology of the human brain, 'present us with a self-organising capacity' that integrates neurophysiological experience, memory and cultural influence into a dynamic and emergent network of nuanced associations. Doing is embedded in thinking and communicating, whether metaphorical or literal and 'is based on the same conceptual system that we use in thinking and acting'.[37] Just as the experience of spatial orientation created the metaphorical balance schema, bodily manipulation and experience creates ontological schemata, including the *into-out of* schema, and ontological metaphors derived from them.

The *body as a container* metaphor is structured by two biocultural concepts: tissues, organs and life-sustaining fluids are *inside* the body; and, food goes *into* the body while waste comes *out of* it. With the skin and mucosa acting as the boundaries of the container-body, the metaphor generates cultural connotations: that which is inside should remain so and that which is outside should only venture inside via culturally acceptable means. When something contravenes the in-out norms associated with the container-body revulsion, disgust, and at times pleasure, may be generated. Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject can be utilised at this juncture to explore this complex corporeal-affective dynamic.

In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva addresses a specific embodied reaction to certain subject matter — she pointedly looks to nausea, excrement, death and the

[37] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 3.

corpse to illustrate her theory, all of which have a clear cogency to *The Human Centipede* and its sequel — that creates a violently uncanny response in the mind of the viewer. Kristeva's abject proceeds from a phenomenological basis, beginning with a strong physiological reaction —

> a massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But not nothing either. A 'something' that I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me. On the edge of nonexistence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me.[38]

For Kristeva, the abject is a complex dynamic of misrecognition, a play between the cognitive categories of me/not me and inside/outside that acknowledges and subverts, rather than supports, these binaries. It draws upon the faculties of one that enables the other to exist — the bounded nature of inside that also constitutes the free-flowing outside that becomes its antithesis — such that both are invoked in a grotesque contradiction of their individual signification. While Kristeva relates the abject directly to psychoanalytic notions of desire, drive and repression to account for what she calls the 'vortex of summons and repulsion' created by the abject the fact that she chooses nausea, excrement, death and the corpse as exemplary examples connects her theory directly to the human body.[39] Indeed, it was argued in the introduction to this thesis that the abject reaction requires a highly specified body schema to be in place before self-identification and the subsequent abjecting of certain bodily remnants can occur, and that the abject is created as a by-product of this incomplete self-identification.

In the experience of nausea, Kristeva describes one bodily action in terms of another when she writes that '*I give birth to myself* amid the violence of sobs, of vomit'.[40] In nausea the involuntary overtakes conscious control of the organic body in a way that reaffirms the materiality of life. Nausea is an evolutionary measure that is difficult, if not impossible, to control. It is both a denial of (conscious) agency and a

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[38] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 2.
[39] Kristeva, p. 1.
[40] Kristeva, p. 3; emphasis added.

reaffirmation of (physiological) agency that mingles the self and body in a repugnant moment of now-ness as the self becomes other to its own material existence. It is this false Othering of the body as separate to 'me' that produces the oscillating notion suggested in the extended quotation above — 'Not me. Not that. But not nothing either' — that suggests that the abject is most intimately connected to the norms and experiences of the perceiving body. Kristeva goes on to explain that,

> I experience abjection only if an Other has settled in place and stead of what will be 'me'. Not at all an Other whom I identify and incorporate, but *an Other who precedes and possesses me, and through such possession causes me to be*. A possession previous to my advent […] significance is indeed inherent in the human body.[41]

What Other has the ability to precede the Self that is used to define the very parameters of the other? If we invoke Kristeva's psychoanalytic heritage and assume that 'me' refers to the conscious construct of myself, the preceding Other becomes my material self, the one who denies *conscious* authority and reinstates organic authority and inevitability. Humans do not often consider themselves as confined or limited and yet the human body restricts as much as it enables. We see only a small spectrum of light. We hear only a small range of sound. We are adapted to succeed in a highly specified environment, and these adaptations directly effect consciousness. Existential experience prefigures consciousness; physiology exists before 'me'. My body and my capacity to experience shape what and how I sense, perceive and think. Kristeva claims that in abjection

> we are no longer in the sphere of the unconscious but *at the limit of primal repression* that, nevertheless, has discovered an *intrinsically corporeal* and already signifying brand, symptom, and sign: repugnance, disgust, abjection. There is an effervescence of object and sign – not of desire but of *intolerable significance*; they tumble over into non-sense or the *impossible real*, but they appear even so in spite of 'myself' (which is not) as abjection.[42]

Abjection thus lies at the very limits of comprehension, at a point of pre-meaning whose significance is imposing and corporeally felt. Abjection exists at a place of genesis where physiological experiences begin to impose upon the individual and

[41] Kristeva, p. 10; emphasis added.
[42] Kristeva, p. 11; emphasis added.

constitute the material world. We feel the Other — who is, I propose, our material self, that thing that stands before all else (including the symbolic Mother) — begin to impose its will upon us, challenging our conscious understandings with knowledge that is alien yet undeniable. The disjunction between how we think and how we experience makes the position of abjection seem alien and Other. Genesis masquerades as exogenesis thus generating the corporeal and significant slippage — me/not me, self/other, proper/improper — that constitutes the abject. The abject cannot be divorced from the Self because although it appears to be exterior it is, in fact, interior. *The Human Centipede*'s surgical connections that symbolically materialise the innards of the organic body seek to re-interiorise the abject by raising awareness of the material Other as an integral part of the Self. The contravention of the *into-out of* schema implied by the consumption of faeces problematizes the categories of inside and outside both physiologically – human waste is expelled from the body; it is rightly *outside* and should remain that way – and socially.

The social construction of waste products has seen human faeces become a symbol of filth, baseness and a lack of refinement. In *History of Shit*, Dominique LaPorte traces the symbolic nature of excreta to the on-going and somewhat meandering process of developing cleanliness in human civilisation. Taking sixteenth-century France as his point of departure, LaPorte documents what he terms the 'privatisation' or 'domestication' of waste whereby human and animal waste products were removed from public view and interred within the household: from outside to inside.[43] The increasing use of latrines and cesspools in domestic settings removed excreta from the public sphere and in doing so helped to create a paradigmatic shift in the way excreta were viewed.

> If something like a goal can be said to be achieved [through the privatization of waste], it is always at the price of a certain loss of the object (in this case, shit), which is bypassed in favour of its symbolic substitute. Furthermore, it is less the object in question that counts than the subject's relationship to it.[44]

[43] Dominique LaPorte, *History of Shit*, trans. by Nadia Benabid and Rodolphe el-Khoury (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000 [1978]), p. 28.
[44] LaPorte, p. 48.

The 'cleaning' of waste from public view and its continued invisibility bestows upon it a certain quality of un-desirableness that was perhaps not intrinsic to the substance itself.[45] By virtue of its banishment it *becomes* filth because what is cast out of society is surely that which would inhibit or disable the 'correct' functioning of civilisation. The notion that if sanitation is attended to 'civilization will take care of itself' is so entrenched in Western culture that 'the body [becomes] a symbol of society' and its waste is the waste of society.[46] Human excreta is cast out and made filthy by the special measures taken to remove it and, in turn, the absent waste attains a symbolic dimension that allows it to not only define itself as filth but also to define its antithesis — cleanliness, good health and civility. In doing so, however, the invisible (and by virtue of its invisibility, abject) object *becomes* its symbolic dimension, a simulacrum that defines its semantic opposite more than itself. In LaPorte's terms

> by elevating bodies and objects […] to the status of signs, it places them in a translucent state: the very light that penetrates them blurs their contours, renders them opaque and tasteless, luminous and free of smell.[47]

Through the process of removing excreta from the public sphere, waste becomes a symbol that opposes itself. It is no longer organic matter, natural by-product of life-sustaining mechanisms but *waste*, signifier of filth and lack of social refinement. It becomes that which should be expunged, the dirty secret of human existence, yet it is oddly divorced from its human producer. In its symbolic form it has no organic reality — no smell, no taste, no image — to the extent that the only real significance it can gain is through its absence. After all, 'good health is signalled by the overall absence of [waste and] smells and a quasi-palatable excremental odour sets the norm'.[48] Faeces have not always been considered as the ultimate symbol of unhealthy waste yet the longstanding cultural association of excrement with filth generates and upholds the view that 'if I can maintain myself upright, if I can contain myself, then others must not remind me – must be prohibited from making me feel – that I once

[45] Indeed, LaPorte notes many archaic practices that utilise human urine and faeces in everything from beauty products to medicine and, more persistently, in organic fertiliser.
[46] Reginald Reynolds, *Cleanliness and Godliness* (Norwich: Jarrold and Sons, 1946), p. 7; Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge, 1966), p. 115.
[47] LaPorte, p. 80.
[48] LaPorte, p. 82.

walked on all fours'.[49] *The Human Centipede*, however, contravenes this notion by taking the symbolic aspect of excreta (entrenched in the processes, physical and metaphorical, of production and consumption) and forcibly reattaching it to the organic human body, as Heiter proposes to attach his victims to one another. The absent presence of waste (which mimics the absent presence of the body within the wider culture) is signalled in *The Human Centipede* by the sterility of the wounds and bandages. Little is 'in view' in terms of the gross potential of the subject matter and yet its implications resonate clearly. The combination of physical understanding and socially constructed emotive metaphor succinctly communicate the abject without the need to visualise it explicitly.

From the moment the deformed centipede diagram is shown onscreen the captives and the viewer are enticed into an atmosphere of dread by the implications of the operation. An insidious disgust is implanted into the film and reinforced with each successive oral exploration. Heiter wakes Jenny by inserting a finger into her slightly open mouth in what is both an invasive and erotic gesture. The IV tubes Heiter has installed in each captive bypass the correct functioning of the digestive system and imply a perverted, incorrect function that foregrounds the digestive tract. The gentle indentations of the pen Heiter uses to mark out the facial incisions remind the viewer of the impassable surface of the container body whilst indicating it as the site of abjection. Following the centipede operation the connective wounds are dressed and invisible but the cheek wounds stand as the signifier of the horror beneath the bandages (Figure 3.6). They arc with a hideous grace, the edges swollen where the flesh of one meets the flesh of another, and appear as a grotesque continuation of an exaggerated jester-like smile that extends and mutates the mouth of the victims. This image of the captive, mutilated and hybridised body implies the necessity of coprophagia without the need for explicitness. Indeed, there is only one instance of faecal consumption in *The Human Centipede* despite the three victims being conjoined for a number of days, and this takes up mere seconds of the film. What this demonstrates is that the social construction of faeces is more horrifying than the representable reality. Moreover, it shows that allowing the metaphorical meaning of a

[49] LaPorte, p. 64.

trope to interact with the visceral representation of the physical act can often heighten both the meaning and the physical affect generated by its inclusion.

The oscillation between metaphorical meaning and embodied response, between reacting to the physiological and social abjection implicit in the image, returns us to a way of seeing that alternates between Laura U. Marks' definitions of the optic and the haptic.

> Optical visuality depends on a separation between the viewing subject and the object. Haptic looking tends to move over the surface of its object rather than plunge into illusionistic depth, not to distinguish form so much as to discern texture. It is more inclined to move than to focus, more inclined to graze than to gaze.[50]

For Marks, optical visuality is the way of seeing most often assumed by traditional film theory, including Laura Mulvey's fetishistic scopophilia and narcissistic identification, and critical responses to so-called 'torture porn' films that focus upon the visuality of the pornography-horror dynamic. The distance Marks notes is a metaphorical one whereby the viewer approaches the image, not as a phenomenon that has been presented to the viewing body, but as an already-perceived and categorised projection of a fictive reality. The viewer engages with the film's representation, but not the *film* itself. In this mode of seeing, Lindsay's facial wounds express the perverse nature of Heiter's fantasy, symbolise the enmeshing of the digestive tract and the subversion of social normality through the swollen edges and

Figure 3.6: Facial Wounds and Directional Gaze, *The Human Centipede*

[50] Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), p. 162.

the industrial staples that create the artificial, monstrous connection and imply the consumption of another body's faeces without needing to explicate these facts. Yet this mode of seeing bypasses a crucial element of the viewing experience: the act of viewing itself. Before the viewer is able to access the metaphorical meanings they are accosted bodily by the image, by its isolation of the single wound, its muted colour palette, its inclusion of Lindsay's nose that reaffirms the sensory devolution implied by the persistent image of the dog and by Lindsay's direct visual address to the camera that communicates acknowledgement of her fate and fear at the inevitability of death. The involvement of bodily experience and knowledge that permeates *The Human Centipede* is invited by the image that presents a segment of a segment, a single wound carried by the mid-section of the centipede. There is no depth into which the viewer may plunge, in Marks' terms, no intrinsic meaning to this single image that the viewer may latch onto and identify with. They are instead presented with the rawness of the wound, the staples that dehumanise and make flesh out of the fortress-body, spring holes in the container-body and the glossy sheen of Lindsay's eyes as emotions rise and conjoin in disarray. If the camera were to pan out slightly, however, to reveal the rise and fall of Katsuro's torso, the extent of the nappy-like bandages and the proximity of his legs to Lindsay's naked shoulders, the possibility of optical visuality would be introduced. The segment of a segment would be recognised as a body within a body, a perverse adaptation, and the significance of the centipede operation would again align itself with social metaphor and the wider context of body horror. Such sliding between the haptic and the optic mode of seeing is possible because the two do not form a binary, where one negates the possibility of the other, but are within a spectrum. The way in which the image is presented offers the viewer the opportunity to consciously engage optically, haptically or with a combination of the two. The haptic images of *The Human Centipede,* and the other films discussed in this thesis, are not simply imposed upon the viewer but are offered through the fragmentation of the human body and appeals to embodied knowledge concerning the 'correct' modes of being-in-the-world.

This thesis has begun to extend the boundaries of haptic towards the somatic as it has traced the tangible connections between sensory modalities and pertinent structures of understanding that arise from embodied experience. In so doing, it has suggested that the senses not often associated with film – touch, balance, orientation,

smell, and taste – can be equally and effectively incorporated into the viewing experience. *The Human Centipede* is quite subtle in its invocation of smell and taste, with much of its horror being generated implicitly. *The Human Centipede 2* (2011), however, mounts an explicit sensual assault upon the viewer as it documents Martin Lomax's obsession with *The Human Centipede.* The following discussion will explicate the connections between the usually implicit sensory modalities that demonstrate the inherent interconnections between sensations, perceptions, psychology and culture.

Somatic Viewing

The Human Centipede 2 begins by replaying the final scenes of its predecessor as Jenny dies and Lindsay is stranded between two corpses. Displayed in monochrome, the muted colour of the original drained, the camera transitions through alternating haptic and optic images. A close-up of Lindsay's face focuses upon her wounds, the tears streaming down her cheeks, and her muffled cries are heard before cutting to an image of one of her hands as she grasps Jenny's, the fingers straining and intertwining in front of the confused assemblage of arms, legs, thighs and torsos. The shot cuts again and returns to Lindsay's face from a different angle, the bottom half of her features obscured by the layers of bandages, and then finally moves to a mid-length shot that displays the entirety of Lindsay and the corpses that enclose her. The proximity of the camera to Lindsay's body reinstates the fascinated looking evoked by the original film, as fine details are somehow made starker by the monochrome scheme. Black stains stand out against the grey carpet and bandages as the camera pans backwards, incrementally revealing more of the gruesome and inescapable scene. After a brief moment the camera tracks upwards to pass through a close-up of roof tiles, the uniform pattern and slight sheen infusing an altogether more stable texture to the shot, and finally settles upon the treetops. The only sound throughout this movement is the consistently audible sobs of Lindsay even as the camera leaves and all hope is relinquished. Isolated from its own narrative and devoid of colour, this scene is presented as a washed-out replica of the original. It stands alone as a reminder of the previous film but lacks the context that created its previous poignancy. Moreover, the lack of colour detracts from the visual contrasts created by

the red blood, white bandages, pink skin and Jenny's cadaverous appearance that reminded viewers that Lindsay remains alive and stranded between two corpses. The limitation of the soundscape, also present in the original, adds to the sense of isolation to effectively maroon the viewer of *The Human Centipede 2* in a place where context seems to be assumed but remains just beyond reach. The scene cuts to reveal that it is playing on a computer screen watched by Martin Lomax: what had started as part of the narrative abruptly becomes a postmodern decoy that prepares the viewer to move beyond the narrative, which has already been fragmented and layered, and engage bodily with the images before them.

Martin, an obese, middle-aged man with learning difficulties who works as a car park attendant, plans to emulate and exceed Dr. Heiter by constructing a twelve-person centipede. A narrative of excess is a critical component of the meta-textual reflexivity of *The Human Centipede 2*. Six's original film was met with mixed reviews by the popular press, with Roger Ebert claiming that 'no horror film I've seen inflicts more terrible things on its victims'.[51] Six clearly interpreted the challenge with his sequel, which was banned by the BBFC due to 'the spectacle of the total degradation, humiliation, mutilation, torture, rape and murder of [Martin's] naked victims'. The BBFC rejection continues to note that 'there is little attempt to portray any of the victims in the film as anything other than objects to be brutalised and degraded for the amusement and sexual arousal of the main character and for the pleasure of the viewer'.[52] It seems that when Ebert asked 'is [*The Human Centipede*] good? Is it bad? Does it matter?' the answer was 'yes', because declaring Tom Six's original film as a work of malicious degradation foreshadowed the mutated birth of its sequel – a film that is everything detractors claimed *The Human Centipede* to be. It is a dialogue with its critics, and with its fans.

Martin Lomax's first appearance is pre-empted by off screen coughing as the credits roll over the monochrome scene from the original film. A slightly canted camera angle reveals the side of his head: his cheek appears bulbous, a shape

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[51] Roger Ebert, '*The Human Centipede* (2009) Review', *Roger Ebert.com* (2010) <http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/the-human-centipede-2010> [accessed 4 July 2014] (para. 1 of 12).

[52] BBFC, 'The Human Centipede 2 (Full Sequence) Rejection Explanation', *BBFC.co.uk* (n.d.) <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/releases/human-centipede-2-full-sequence>, [accessed 4 July 2014] (para. 1 of 4).

emphasised by the low-key lighting and lack of distinguishing colour, his hair is thinning and his glasses are discernibly thick as he watches *The Human Centipede*, seemingly mesmerised. A cut takes us to a long shot that places Martin in his car park booth with half of his face visible through the window. This visual isolation of Martin sets him apart from other bodies that may appear onscreen, but the fragmenting of his physical form also aligns him with the haptic mode of viewing elicited by the preceding close-ups of Lindsay's face and hands. His body is disjointed and the viewer does not yet have a full picture with which to identify. As a result, the contours of Martin's form, the roundness of his cheek, the distortion of his glasses' lens and his short stature move to the fore. When Martin's entire face is shown it is these small details that draw the viewer's attention (Figure 3.7).

Figure 3.7: Martin Lomax, *The Human Centipede 2* (2011)

As Martin looks directly at the camera two aspects of the image reach out to the viewer more insistently than others: a perceived fish-eyed effect and the sheen of sweat that covers his skin. His positioning at the centre of the frame in shallow focus gives him optical precedence and an overbearing visual weight: he is the largest and most imposing object in the frame and his globular form draws the viewer's attention. The convex arc of his head is exaggerated by his almost comically large glasses and surpassed only by the deeper convex line of his shoulders. The lighting in the scene picks out and seems to deepen each crease and roll of Martin's skin whilst highlighting with iridescence the sweat in which it is coated. His slightly parted lips, again swathed in deep shadow, and bulging eyes both seem to embody some kind of pressure that is pushing outwards from his insides, forcing sweat and effluvia to seep

out. Martin Lomax possesses a vaguely amphibious body that appears to leak into and onto the film. The ways in which he leaks are decidedly abject and demonstrate the refutation of the container-body manifested in *The Human Centipede.* If the abject is concerned with borders and categories whereby 'the border has become an object […] something rejected from which one does not part' we can quite fairly say that Martin's border, his skin, is failing in its purpose.[53] It fails to keep what properly belongs to the inside within his skin — as his centipede creation fails to keep what is properly outside from entering its mutated body — yet the continuous leaking reaffirms the origin of the effluvia.[54] If, as LaPorte suggests, 'human excrement, like the soul, carries the 'noxious' trace of the body it departs', Martin's continuous seeping not only creates a spectacle of the abject but strives to reconnect human waste to its point of origin.[55] This waste no longer functions metaphorically, it is no longer a mere concept that defines the correct functions of civilisation, but is irreducibly and inescapably organic. It is, in a sense, alive.

The fluids that leave Martin's body of their own accord, ejecting themselves or seeping through his pores in an almost continuous stream, are waste products of bodily functions and it is this status that ties them to the abject. Kristeva states that waste and 'these body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty' and that contact with them brings an individual to 'the border of [their] condition as a living being'.[56] The fluids that Martin excretes so copiously are remnants that remind viewers of the organic status of not just the human body, but of *this* human body. The continued expulsion of fluid from Martin's body gives the character a distinctly tactile wetness that is repulsive: repellent, disgusting, rejected. Martin, like the centipede, questions the distinct and bounded nature of human experience that in turn highlights the continuous sensual relationship each human

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[53] Kristeva, p. 4.
[54] A similar combination of tactile wetness and the literal stretching of the body's boundary occurs in Brett Leonard's *Feed* (2005), which sees protagonist Michael feed women to death and broadcast their demise over the internet. There are extended scenes of sitophilia involving atypical foods as erotic aids: greasy burgers, tins of cold baked beans and fried chips. As Michael indulges in an all-over body massage of his willing captive Deidre, the viscous tactility of the oily foodstuffs combines with Deidre's obese form. Her flesh undulates beneath the mucosal layer of food and the protrusions of her body take on an odd inside-out tactility, invoked by the placing of food *on* her body rather than *in* it. As the food continues to slop and slide, it is as if Michael were giving an internal colonic massage instead of an external erotic one.
[55] LaPorte, p. 35.
[56] Kristeva, p. 3.

being has with their environment. Martin's body foregrounds its functions in such a way that the viewer's senses are foregrounded by association. His body recalls to the viewer's mind their body; he is the 'not me' that defines 'me' in Kristeva's abjection-reaction, an Other to the viewer's self-image that is simultaneously a reflection of their own inescapably messy materialism.

This type of repulsion is then utilised as the images of Martin transition from the haptic ones that display only parts of his distorted body to longer, optical shots that display his entire body. It is in the optical shots that the metaphorical associations of bodily fluid and waste begin to infiltrate the presentation of his character. Kristeva writes that 'abjection is coextensive with social and symbolic order, on the individual as well as on the collective level […] One encounters it as soon as the symbolic and/or social dimension of man is constituted'.[57] The abject is not merely limited to physical experience and the abjection of certain bodily acts or fluids is not simply a case of physical repulsion. As the general principle that bacteria is carried in stools is exacerbated by a social impetus towards cleanliness that generates an intense repulsion towards faeces, so too are other bodily fluids subjected to social coding of their abject nature. Blood, for example, is often socially accompanied by panic and distress. The significance of blood is myriad: it denotes wounding, the pain of an individual, disease through its associations with HIV, gender through its associations with menstruation and it also signifies the disruption of social order by violent conflict. In this manner, Martin's effluvia are both symbols of his physical malfunction – he suffers from asthma, obesity, vision problems and learning difficulties – but also of the malfunction of society against which his body stands as a non-hegemonic anti-body.

Another aspect of tactile texture that infuses the film is the absent presence of the human bowel. The insides of the human body are implied by the slew of fluid that streams from Martin but each instance of secretion stands, in part, for the pinnacle of excretion that the viewer acknowledges and awaits throughout the film. Martin's body itself appears to approximate the bulbous, twisting form of the digestive system as each convex line of his head and body imitates the rippling intestines. Even the way

[57] Kristeva, p. 68.

his flesh moves as he dances amidst his centipede creation mimics the slippery undulations of the inner organs, coated as it is in his mucosal effluvia. In its specific physicality, Martin's human centipede readily invites comparisons to the structure of the human intestines (Figure 3.8). Increasing in scale from Heiter's three-person centipede, the ten interconnected human bodies produce a whole that undulates asymmetrically as they crawl around the floor, the serpentine movements mirroring the culturally accepted depictions of the small and large intestines as convoluted and misshapen. The low-key lighting and monochrome colour scheme serve to de-saturate the scene and prevent the viewer from discerning fine details. As a result, the overall shape of the centipede and the intermittent contrasts between light and dark are brought to the fore to invite the viewer to experience the scene not solely through its visual content but also through its slimy texture. The mismatch of body sizes and types leads to slighter bodies flailing between oversized companions, arms and legs fumbling against one another as the centipede shuffles and snakes its way around the empty warehouse accompanied by the churning sounds of stifled cries and muffled gags.

Figure 3.8: Martin's Centipede, *The Human Centipede*

The scene above explicitly displays the focus of horror in the film as the human body is effectively reduced to its digestive system and waste products but this scene does not end there. In addition to creating a hybrid monster and manifesting the wetness and revulsion of the human intestines in its physical form, Martin wishes to breach yet another physical and social boundary. In order to heighten the intense level of distaste generated by the scene, the haptic imagery of *The Human Centipede 2* must go further and traverse the border of somatic imagery by vividly invoking the senses of smell and taste.

The mechanics of Dr. Heiter's centipede operation in *The Human Centipede* along with the continued invocation of the image of the dog subtly simulated the viewer's sense of smell through the associations of the visual cues. It was not explicitly addressed in the film even in the single scene of coprophagia that served to satisfy the expectations of the viewer and it remains a testament to the emotional significance of the sense of smell that such an implication can be maintained without it featuring in the film as a referential entity in itself. Olfaction, despite being relatively unrefined in humans, is one of the more emotionally charged senses due to its neural association with the hypothalamus and the limbic system, the part of the human brain that regulates emotions and memories.[58] As a result of this connection, smell is much more easily associated with emotional events and particular odours are more likely to create long lasting memory impressions than other sensory input.[59] The sense of smell is interesting not only for its strong emotional connotations but also for its mechanics: smell is a chemical sense that requires physical contact between the receptors of the nose and the particles that generate the odour. Unlike hearing or vision, in which waves influence the sense organs into making movements or changes that are then translated into light or sound as we understand them, smell along with its partner sense, taste, requires some kind of contact between the sensing body and the other 'body' that generates the smell. In this way it 'forces contact among bodies: chemical bodies, our own bodies that act in sympathy with them, and the social body in which we all partake'.[60] Like Martin's grotesque centipede, the sense of smell quite literally unites the physical experience of an individual with their emotional and social existence to create an intense, and in this instance uniquely unsavoury, experience. One must remember that the sense of smell was, and still is, used for survival reasons, 'to check for the presence of rotting meat, mould, infection, sewage, gas leaks, and other things that pose a danger'.[61] As a result, the strength of a smell is often positively correlated with the perceived threat to human life: strong smells, and a sustained effort to simulate them, would quite naturally lend themselves to the

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[58] Neil R. Carlson, *Foundations of Behavioural Neuroscience*, 8th edn (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 2011), p. 206.
[59] This is true of mammals in general. The dog that acted as the conduit for smell experience in *The Human Centipede* is known to have life-long 'smell memories' that allow it to recognise any previously encountered scent regardless of the interval between encounters.
[60] Marks, *Touch*, p. 116.
[61] Laura U. Marks, 'Thinking Multisensory Culture', *Paragraph*, 31 (2008), 123-37 (p. 130).

construction of an intensely negative emotional experience. Recall too that, for LaPorte, the eradication of smell went hand-in-hand with a drive towards overall cleanliness and the removal of waste from public view.

Smell is not a sense that is conventionally stimulated by film. This is perhaps due, in part, to the relative complexity of the nose – the eye, for example, has four different receptor cells (red, blue, green cones and rods) whereas the nose has approximately 1,000 receptors each attuned to a different chemical bond. As Joseph Kaye notes, 'the complexity of this problem is such that the science of smell has not even been successful in creating a rigorous, systematic, and reproducible classification scheme for [it]'.[62] As a result, attempts at integrating odours into theatrical or cinematic performances have been limited to the selection of existing scents that are the most appropriate for a given scene or event. The phenomenal contingency between vision and olfaction has, thus far, been an approximation that lacks the inherent synergy between an object and phenomenological scent. In addition, 'odour perception is highly subjective, has a habit of changing and it has also been found to be greatly influenced by age, sex, social and cultural factors, as well as by emotions, memory, experience and input from other sensory modalities'.[63] It is, therefore, routinely difficult to produce a consistent reaction to a particular scent in any situation, which perhaps accounts for the commercial failure of 'Aromarama' and 'Smell-O-Vision' during the 1950s.[64]

The sense of smell is spectral in *The Human Centipede 2*: present through the associations of other sense modalities, but extremely affective. In the original film it was subtly infused through the image of the dog and the recurrent isolation of Lindsay's eyes and nose framed by her facial wounds. In the sequel it is present through Martin's profuse leaking. Each expulsion of waste product from his body is in part symbolic of the ultimate act of excretion with which the film is preoccupied.

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[62] Joseph Kaye, 'Aromatic Output for HCI', *Interactions*, n.s., 11 (2004), 48-61 (p. 50).
[63] Gheorghita Ghinea and Oluwakemu A. Ademoye, 'Olfaction-Enchanced Multimedia: Perspectives and Challenges', *Multimedia Tools and Applications*, 55 (2011), 601-626 (p. 605).
[64] Aromarama was an adaptation of a ventilation system that could introduce aromas into an auditorium on cue. It was also able to clear an aroma and replace it with another when required. Smell-O-Vision had a similar mechanic but instead delivered scents to individual chairs through a network of pipes. The film or its soundtrack cued both systems and the intensity of scents could be controlled in the projection room. Neither system, however, proved to be popular or cost effective.

With each seeping or ejection the viewer is at once reminded of the act of defecation and the closely associated smell. The embodiment of the human bowel found in Martin's centipede reinforces this association as the creature engages in peristaltic movements and loses its own bodily fluid: blood, sweat, tears and eventually faeces. Following his triumphant dance, Martin offers his creation food, mimicking Heiter's use of the dog bowl in place of a plate. The soundscape here takes the opportunity to reinforce both the feeling of wetness and the association with faeces as Martin empties a tin of stew that plops and splashes into the bowl. As Martin collects a funnel and length of plastic tubing with which to force feed his creation, the camera cuts to close-ups of the segments, focusing upon their faces with only their eyes and noses visible. The long, scared, gasping breaths of the segments reinvigorate the sense of smell before the wet sounds of the first segment choking on the tubing dominate the soundtrack. Finally, unsatisfied with the lack of excretion the centipede has engaged in so far, Martin proceeds along the construction squeezing the stomachs so that each segment noisily breaks wind. The sound, which is integrated very high in the audio mix so that it remains unnaturally loud, replicates those that preceded it – the slop of the stew, the mucosal choking of the first segment as it is force fed – and exceeds them through its close association with the act for which it stands. Despite this association, and the growing dis-ease in the viewer, Martin remains dissatisfied with the mere sound, imitating and exaggerating it out of frustration before proceeding to inject high doses of laxative in each of the centipede segments. The gradual crescendo of sound and the sustained presence of the human bowel through metaphors of viscera and wetness finally culminate in the spectacle of noise and disgust generated as Martin's vision comes to fruition. A brief close-up of Martin's face reveals his pleasurable anticipation before the centipede, the walls, Martin, and even the camera are lavishly covered with faeces. In this scene Martin's centipede completes a literal as well as metaphorical transition from ten individual people to a living model of the human digestive system as Martin stands behind it: the animated conductor of an abject symphony of faecal flatulence.

The simulation of smell stems from the associations of other sensory modalities, including touch and sound that are given precedence over the ordinarily dominant sense of sight. The individual details of the scenes, where blood transitions into faeces for example, fade into the background as the contours and movements

combine with the soundscape to create the overwhelming impression of slime and peristaltic movement, that invokes smell and its counterpart - taste. Smell and taste are closely linked proximally, as the nasal cavity connects to the rear of the mouth, mechanically as they are both chemical senses, and culturally. It is anecdotally accepted that carnivorous mammals, such as dogs and cats, respond more enthusiastically to food with a strong smell than to food without. This is because food is 'tasted' through a combination of odour and smell so that when smell is impaired, when one has a cold for example, food tastes different. As a result, a strong simulation of smell necessarily involves a subsequent simulation of taste. Additionally, the subject matter of the film, together with its distinct wetness, draws forth associations of nausea commonly associated with Julia Kristeva's food loathing: 'perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection' that permeates human behaviour to the point of apparent automation.[65] Food loathing is an embodied reaction incorporating smell, taste and touch in the violent expulsion of an object.

It may be that the inherent nature of food loathing originates in the physiological basis: unsavoury foodstuffs are prone to cause illness or death and ridding the body of them is of paramount importance. As a result, lasting associations are easily made between taste, its counterpart smell and the act of cleansing the body of foreign pathogens. Nausea is a process that Kristeva marks as particularly and uncannily abject as she writes,

> but since the food is not an 'other' for 'me' […] I expel *myself*. I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which 'I' claim to establish *myself*. That detail, perhaps an insignificant one, but one that they ferret out, emphasize, evaluate, that trifle turns me inside out, guts sprawling.[66]

The nausea associated with food loathing is not a direct response to the food itself, but rather a pre-emptive response of the body to its own impending reaction to something. In evolutionary terms, nausea is a survival mechanism but it entails the body acting upon itself whilst seemingly responding to the food. Kristeva notes that food cannot be 'other' to 'me' as it cannot stand in opposition to me or the principles of my

[65] Kristeva, p. 3.
[66] Kristeva, p. 3 (original emphasis).

existence. The ‘other’ is the perceived othering of my own body that would occur upon ingestion: the separation of my bodily response from my conscious will. Nausea aims to prevent this turning inside out of the body by enacting a diluted version of it and forcing the viscera to attention in an inauspicious gesture. The outpouring of flatulence followed by the frenzied excretion of faeces by the centipede combines visual, audible, tactile and olfactory simulation in such a manner that taste, and nausea, are woven into the texture of the scene through its various associations. There is no denying that the aim of these scenes in *The Human Centipede 2* is to repeatedly force feed the viewer the concept of coprophagia in a more sustained and graphic manner than the original film accomplished and the combinations of sensory stimulation inherent within the film achieve this unequivocally.

Final Sequence

Although undeniably disturbing *The Human Centipede* (2009) contains few explicitly violent scenes. One of the more disturbing images in the film consists of a single frame shot: Heiter has completed the centipede operation and the camera cuts to show him slumped upon the dogs’ grave before cutting again to the recovery room. The human centipede lays upon a large hospital gurney; where before there were three individual people, each covered from shoulders to toes with modesty sheets, there is now only one distorted shape under a green blanket. Katsuro’s head is uncovered and attached to a ventilator with a hand protruding from the blanket half way down. Whilst revealing nothing of the full extent of the horror, this single image implies the threat that is embodied by the narrative. It is the viewer that completes the image, constructing it through their own body as they conjure what lies beneath the blanket. The very notion, without the need for demonstration, of attempting to sustain a human body on a substance with such low nutritional value and such an intense cultural negativity produces a dual disgust reflex. Firstly, reversing the normal flow of waste from in-out to out-in plays upon the socially unacceptable taboo of coprophagia and its connotations of disease, death and animality. If, as Kristeva suggests, ‘orality signifies a boundary of the self’s clean and proper body’ the forced coprophagia of *The Human Centipede* issues an attack on both the physical human body and the

social norms it often represents.[67] Secondly, by forcing coprophagia on the human victims the body becomes trivialised as organic matter. The biological workings of the human body, which are socially nullified, ignored or vilified ordinarily, are exposed and brought to the centre of attention both within the narrative and within the viewing body. Foregrounding the human body's messy materialism is, of course, not a new phenomenon and could be seen as a reaction to certain sociocultural conditions.

It was suggested at the beginning of this chapter that the dominant culture of the spectacle, and the increasing propagation of images of the human body that signify something other than the body proper, has brought into question the nature of embodiment in contemporary society. The immediacy of the body has become ambiguously confused: on the one hand the mass media pushes the need for the 'correct' maintenance of the body through healthy eating and exercise, while on the other scientific advances in therapeutic cloning of human embryos suggest that fundamental modification is not only acceptable, but sometimes desirable.[68] What arises from this contradictory congregation of social imperatives (cherish it, keep it healthy, make it beautiful, enhance it, reprogram it, swap it) is a psychopathology relating to body images and the image of the body. The body becomes a chameleon: changing its colour, size, shape and contours to best suit its sociocultural environment. More importantly, the consumer embroiled in this culture becomes curiously disembodied, imprisoned in a maze of spectacular body images that insidiously overrule the materiality of their organic body.

When considering *The Human Centipede* films as a cultural product, it is impossible to ignore the appeal to, and critique of, a contemporary consumer culture that indefatigably enacts the metamorphosis of the body and insists that experiences are *bigger* and *better*, or simply more extreme. The films themselves form part of a horrendous sequence of consumption, as the first gives birth to its sequel, which in turn, we might say, excretes the forthcoming final sequence scheduled for release in

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[67] Kristeva, p. 75.

[68] While surveys show approximately 75% of respondents were morally against reproductive cloning, therapeutic cloning to produce perfect-match organs for transplant and the genetic screening of embryos for abnormalities are only opposed by 52-63% of respondents. Matthew C. Nisbet, 'Public Opinion about Stem Cell Research and Human Cloning', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 68 (2004), 131-54.

2015.[69] Lindsay and Jenny's downfall in the original film came from their desire to consume other cultures and Martin obsessively consumes the original in a pastiche of a stereotype of horror film spectatorship that assumes both pleasure and gratification in viewing. The viewer in the auditorium, however, is revealed as the 'real' monstrous consumer as their desires for extremity create *The Human Centipede* (or *A Serbian Film* (2010), or *MurderSetPieces* (2004), or *The Green Inferno* (2013) et al.).[70] If Marzena Kubisz' claim that 'consumer culture has brought about an unlimited display of physicality in mass culture' is accurate, then *The Human Centipede* and its sequel can be seen as an extended commentary on the avid consumption of bodies wherein the figurative becomes literal; where society spends hours consuming images of the elusive perfect body, *The Human Centipede* ratifies the falsity of that 'perfect body' by transmuting it into faeces in the ultimate display of undeniable, organic physicality.[71] Yet, if there is an unlimited display of physicality in mass culture, including body horror, one would not imagine there to be a need to reinvigorate the body by engaging the senses to the extremes achieved in *The Human Centipede*. The desire to be stimulated in this physiological manner, or even to simply respond to it with any emotion whatsoever, would imply that rather than consumer culture embodying a surge of physicality it somehow ensures the opposite. The dematerialising force of capital – in Marx's lyrical phrase, 'all that is solid melts into air' – renders the body absent as culture erases the physical in favour of *the appearance*.[72] The body is no longer a necessity but a vehicle, as bodily sensation is subsumed by the illusion of disembodied freedom. The embodiments of contemporary horror offer a response to this dematerialisation of the viewer-consumer by exposing the threads of bodily sensation within the viewing experience.

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[69] In an extension of Six's meta-textual recognition of his films' notoriety, *The Human Centipede: Final Sequence* brings both Dieter Laser (Joseph Heiter) and Lawrence R. Harvey (Martin Lomax) back as different characters. Playing Bill *Boss* and Dwight *Butler* respectively, the teacher-student dynamic created between Heiter and Lomax in the first two films looks set to be parodied. Although details of the plot are unconfirmed at the time of writing, it is reputed to be set in an American maximum-security prison and feature the epitome of consumption: a 500-person monstrous centipede.
[70] What all these films have in common, of course, is a collection of socially taboo and abject subject matter: child pornography, child murder, cannibalism and the hedonistic pursuit of personal pleasure through the torture and dismemberment of other people. In most cases, the reputation of these films precedes them either through advertising (*MurderSetPieces* is billed as 'the most visceral horror film ever made') or association (*The Green Inferno* is associated with *Cannibal Holocaust*, for example, through Eli Roth's adoption of Deodato's original working title, its premise and focus upon cannibalism).
[71] Kubisz, p. 8.
[72] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (Salt Lake City: Project Gutenberg, 2005), p. 11. Project Gutenberg eBook (ePub edn).

The manipulation of physiological experience and body schemata performed by these films creates a viewing experience which, like the subject matter, forcefully includes the totality of the human body instead of simply relying upon the mechanisms of vision and identification. The incorporation of the body is perhaps most evident in the construction of *The Human Centipede 2* as it offers a graphic depiction of the deviance largely implied by the first film. Much of the violence of the sequel manifests as a type of sensory sadism whereby vision is limited by the lack of lighting and colour whilst sound, texture, smell and even taste are repeatedly and insistently appealed to metonymically. As a result, *The Human Centipede 2* is embodied in its excess, in the loudness of the sound effects and the lack of musical accompaniment, in the accumulation of images of effluvia and viscera, both literal and figurative, in the extremity of Martin's physique that focuses and enhances the gruesome nature of the depicted acts. The sensory appeals and manipulations are so widely distributed throughout the film and so consistently sustained that the site of disgust and horror is unavoidably and irresistibly relocated from the images that play out onscreen to the organic layers of the viewer's body.

The combination of subject matter and formal elements in Tom Six's films offers the viewer the opportunity to engage both visually and somatically with the films. The embodied knowledge of smell, taste and nausea integrates with the socially abject notion of coprophagia to create a film that is rich with embodied and metaphorical meaning – a film that reaches out to the viewer and stimulates the bodily senses in ways that are relatively unusual in the existing cultural climate. Horror film viewers are accustomed to a certain mode of viewing that allows them a degree of physical and emotional distance from the events of the film (the mechanisms of which are perhaps foregrounded in the post-modern era) but which nevertheless remains constrained within the sphere of entertainment. The combination of physical and metaphorical stimulation evident in *The Human Centipede* films disallows the figurative distance between viewer and film and instead offers an experience which combines enjoyment of familiar narrative arcs with multisensory stimulation through a somatic mode of viewing. The adaptive and metaphorical meaning of the subject matter is 'felt' in the same way that 'up' or 'above' have a felt dimension that contributes to the interpretation of balance and orientation in *The Collector* and *The*

Descent. As a result of this inherently felt meaning the body, the one onscreen and the viewer's body, is brought to embodied consciousness in a continuous and profound manner. The films expose our intrinsic reliance upon the health and proper maintenance of our bodies. Katsuro, Jenny and Lindsay are literally reduced to the sum of their bodily functions and forced to experience visceral operations as 'the basis of the emotional qualities of experience'.[73] Visceral functions define Martin's physical existence as he is literally and metaphorically encased in bodily and societal waste. The body can no longer be taken for granted. At the same time the viewers are invited into a visceral encounter with their own bodily workings as the bodies onscreen mutate, excrete, decay and die.

The discordant nature of this experience stems from the fact that, although the bodily sensations of disgust or nausea are unpleasant they are, to the disembodied consumer of contemporary culture, not unwelcome. They offer a true avenue of material experience in a society that often delivers only facsimiles. The horror of *The Human Centipede* and *The Human Centipede 2* lies in their embodiment of the recurrent horror motif that *we are bodies*; organic matter, like dogs or insects, and that the nature of our physicality shapes and influences the ways in which we are able to exist. It defines the human body as both 'a torturous prison of deception, temptation, and pain' but also the place 'where I retreat from my interest in observing or acting in the world'.[74] The human body is a thing to celebrate and to abhor; it enables and gives rise to our specific form of consciousness and yet relegates our existence to the realm of animals. It is at once sanctuary and prison, enabling life whilst covertly ushering in inevitable death. Perversely, and not entirely unpleasantly, being reminded of this restarts the organic heart of the viewer in a way that is quintessentially arousing.

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[73] Don M. Tucker, *Mind from Body: Experience from Neural Structure* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 14.
[74] Richard Shusterman, *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 51; p. 60.

Chapter 4 – Pain: Feeling the Extreme in *Martyrs* (2008) and *The Bunny Game* (2010)

> The infliction of pain is a thing so naturally revolting to the cultivated mind, that any description of it inevitably arouses strong sentiments of dislike, if not of horror (Francis Power Cobbe, 'The Rights of Man and the Claims of Brutes' [1866])[1]

This thesis began by making the claim that cinema is quintessentially a multisensory medium, not simply because of the technologies of its production but because of the conditions of the viewers' embodiment. Rather than focusing solely upon the interactions between visual and auditory stimuli presented to the viewer the locus of the argument so far has resided within the viewer themselves and with the fundamentally integrated nature of the human sensorium. In the initial chapter a theory of vision was proposed that delineated the seemingly isolated sense into a more physiologically accurate mode of looking that necessarily incorporated and invoked multiple sensory modalities. Laura U. Marks' theory of haptic visuality provided the foundation for this suggestion that outlined a body-shaped void in theories of cinema spectatorship. The ties between vision and the lesser-considered vestibular sense were then demonstrated and it was contended that basic physiological experience provides ontological and orientation metaphors that structure much of our conceptual understanding regarding balance, orientation and directionality. A further level of complexity was discovered when body schemata and metaphors arising from those schemata were considered in relation to the senses of touch, taste and smell. Through nuanced physiological experience and metaphorical understanding, vision provides a gateway to the simulation of sensory modalities one may not automatically consider to be present in the filmic experience. In this manner, the poverty of vision when it is considered in total isolation from its sensory siblings has, it is hoped, become increasingly obvious. The human sensorium is integrated to the point of inextricability, from the micro- to the macro-level of experience and comprehension, and to address any phenomenon through a single, isolated sensory modality is to reduce the phenomenon to a spectre of itself, devoid of the rich sensorial understanding that is intrinsic to all embodied experiences. Yet the very act of

[1] Francis Power Cobbe, 'The Rights of Man and the Claims of Brutes', in *Animal Welfare and Anti-Vivisection 1870-1910: Nineteenth Century Woman's Mission*, ed. by Susan Hamilton (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 1-50 (p. 12).

attempting to think through sensory experience and to share its richness replicates this reduction: whilst arguing for an integration of sensory experience this thesis has nevertheless drawn out individual or small groups of senses in order to first highlight them and then construct a case for their inherent integration. Arguably, the phenomenological method also replicates this reduction as a necessary step towards attempting to communicate the richness of sensory experience.

Edmund Husserl's phenomenological method, adapted and applied to film theory by Vivian Sobchack in *The Address of the Eye*, seeks to discard presuppositions and approach a given phenomenon as it is experienced and 'in the fullness and potential of [its] *possibilities* for experience'.[2] While the emphasis is upon the relationship between the observer and the phenomenon, rather than the phenomenon and the structures of understanding the observer applies to it, the sharing of what appears to the observer entails rendering in descriptive language the richness of the sensorial experience. It has been demonstrated that vision can act as a gateway to other sensory modalities due to the symbiosis of the senses and language can similarly act as a conduit in the communication of sensory phenomena. Our embodiment in the world structures existential experience, which in turn generates a plethora of metaphorical understandings that influence our language system. As such, 'the lived-body being-in-the-world establishes the concrete ground (that is, the premises as well as the necessity) for all language'.[3] That is not to say that the body literally generates language but rather that the need to communicate and the understanding upon which concepts are based arise from the physiological experience of the body. The individual is unceasingly accosted by a multifaceted sensorial richness that is a continuous flow of integrated and developing experience. This phenomenological knowledge can be accessed through language and the complex web of connotations built between linguistic signs and experiential concepts. It is these accumulative associations which allow the more nuanced bodily sensations to be communicated, whether linguistically in text or sensationally in film. Indeed, as sensations become more complex the sharing of them relies increasingly upon the interrelations between bodily experiences, embodied knowledge and metaphorical

[2] Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 36-7 (original emphasis).
[3] Sobchack, p. 41.

associations rather than the unmediated replication of the exact sensation. Undoubtedly the most complex and controversial sensation appealed to by contemporary horror film is pain.

Horror exhibits a predilection for the display of the human body in minute and often disturbing detail. Yet its fascination is not merely with the organicity of the human body, but also with the extremities of physiological arousal and distress. The body in horror film is perpetually *in extremis*: sexual arousal, terror, panic, escape, and the ultimately unavoidable state of intense pain. Beating, torture, evisceration, amputations, flaying, rape, dismemberment, and the slow destruction of the fibres of the victimised body punctuate the contemporary extreme horror film. The representation of the body in pain can be discovered behind all acts of violence – be it evisceration in *Gut* (2012), primitive dismemberment in *The Descent* (2005), slow torture in *The Collector* (2009), poisoning of the prison-body in *The Human Centipede* (2011) or the sustained beatings we shall shortly find in *Martyrs* (2008) and *The Bunny Game* (2010). One cannot systematically destroy the human body onscreen without first inflicting extreme agony upon it. Moreover, in order to *communicate* that represented pain, film must seek to inflict an analogously excruciating sensorial experience upon its viewer. The following discussion will propose that pain is a sensation that must be embodied – felt by the viewer through multiple sensory modalities simultaneously – in order to overcome the paradox of communication and be meaningful as a sensation. Moreover, it will be contended that the sensorial immediacy of pain in contemporary extreme horror contributes significantly to the intense affective response generated by such titles. It will be demonstrated that, where pain is concerned, psychosocial meaning evolves from sensorial comprehension in a way that cements the irreducible relationship between the body, the mind and the social sphere.

Pain and the Paradox of Communication

Pascal Laugier's *Martyrs* (2008) tells the story of Lucie (Mylene Jampanoi), a girl kidnapped and tortured from a young age, and her friend Anna (Morjana Alaoui). Obviously traumatised by her experiences, Lucie is haunted by a terrifying,

apparently supernatural, apparition that continues to inflict injury upon her. As a young adult Lucie seeks out and murders a family she is convinced are responsible for her abduction. Upon joining her, Anna discovers one of the victims is still alive and attempts to help them. Faced with her friend's disbelief Lucie commits suicide, leaving Anna alone to discover that Lucie's actions were justified: these are the people who tortured her.

Martyrs begins with a short scene that prefigures the content and focus of the film. The camera alights on a darkened corridor with bare concrete walls. A young Lucie stumbles into the frame. Bathed in shadow she runs from the camera as her bare feet slap against the floor. She stumbles as she tries to run, hyperventilating and letting out the occasional guttural cry. The camera bobs and shakes as it recreates her jaunty, sharp movements, flailing in the dark as she moves laboriously through the corridors. The girl's body is the only moving object as the camera follows her trajectory from inside the warehouse-like building to the abandoned industrial estate beyond. She crosses the threshold and the scene cuts to the reverse shot as she now runs towards the camera, her face a patchwork of bruises and dried blood (Figure 4.1). The camera slowly cuts between vantage points showing her ravaged face, her blood stained clothes, scarred arms and wounded legs as it accretively reveals her tortured body *in toto*. As she runs through an estate of abandoned and decaying buildings the only sounds that can be heard are those of her cries, her ragged breathing and the distinctive sound of her footsteps. The blood that stains her clothes and the wounds that cover her flesh combine with this muted auditory and visual landscape to enhance the communication of her physical pain.

Figure 4.1: Opening Scene of Pascal Laugier's *Martyrs* (2008)

As the only body in the frame, Lucie's visibly damaged flesh exudes pain with each movement. The flailing of limbs evokes panic, the sound of her feet hitting concrete speaks of desperation and mimics the texture of the slick blood that covers most of her body and, her embittered cries of pain resound through the skeletal buildings as she tries, but ultimately fails, to summon other bodies to enact her rescue. So easily identified are her cries that when the girl eventually stumbles upon freedom the lingering gaze of the camera that reveals her bodily wounds entails little shock; the visual simply restates and reinforces the auditory expression of pain. The unintentional and reflexive cries of pain are more likely to elicit a visceral, emotive response from an observer than the visual representation of the same sensation, according to Kenneth D. Craig et al. (2010).[4] In this manner, the auditory expression of the girl's pain generates an emotive response that preconditions the viewer into expecting a horrific visual counterpart. When the girl finally emerges into the light the lingering shots of her injuries do not present the viewer with new information, but simply compound the already-distinct impression of pain by reiterating it visually.

The foregrounding of pain in this short scene suggests that the sensation speaks both literally and metaphorically. Under extreme pain the human body will pass through a number of reactive phases: avoidance, escape, retaliation and, in lieu of any other effective alternative, vocalisation. The first two phases can be attributed

[4] Kenneth D. Craig, Judith Versloot, Liesbet Goubert, Tine Vervoort and Geert Crombez, 'Perceiving Pain in Others: Automatic and Controlled Mechanisms', *The Journal of Pain*, 11 (2010), 101-108 (p. 104).

to a variety of reflex actions, such as the neuron arc between thermoreceptors in the skin and the spinal cord that causes the immediate removal of a limb from a hot surface; the third can be attributed, at least in part, to hormonal reactions as adrenaline readies the body for the fight-or-flight response. The final phase, however, remains somewhat of a mystery. Why do humans cry out in pain when words fail to encapsulate the sensation? The act of vocalising pain does nothing to alleviate the severity of the sensation thus implying that pain cries have a purpose that is directed outside of the phenomenal body. Yet despite the ostensible will to communicate, the sensation itself appears to lie beyond the reaches of human language manifesting not in words but in feral sounds.

It is this apparent refutation of language that leads Elaine Scarry to designate pain as an ultimately indescribable and unsharable sensation. To the sufferer, pain is undeniable regardless of its origination yet to the pain-free observer the incoherent, animalistic expressions of pain are nearly incomprehensible except in their signification of intense bodily sensation. As such, 'to have great pain is to have certainty; to hear that another person has pain is to have doubt'.[5] The ambiguity of pain communication is perhaps eloquently surmised by the abundance of terms used to articulate it. The McGill Pain Questionnaire, for example, lists seventy-eight adjectives to describe type, intensity and effect for the diagnosis of chronic pain.[6] The range of terms available – including 'flickering', 'sharp', 'jumping', 'scalding', 'dull', 'heavy', 'taut', 'rasping' and 'vicious' to name but a few – would imply that whenever pain is classified by language the full breadth of the experience is never fully captured. Yet the classification of the McGill adjectives into meaningful groups that define individual aspects of the pain experience – 'temporal', 'spatial', 'punctate pressure', 'incisive pressure', 'constrictive pressure', 'traction pressure', 'thermal', 'brightness', 'dullness', 'tension', 'autonomic', 'sensory', 'fear', 'punishment', 'evaluative' and 'affective-evaluative' – would suggest that the range of descriptors is in fact testament to the multifaceted nature of the sensation. It is not that language is inadequate but that the individual facets of sensory perception are difficult to delineate in order to neatly label each one. Describing pain is not a case of identifying

[5] Elaine Scarry, *The Body In Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 7.
[6] The full questionnaire can be found at Grid Enabled Measures Database (GEM) Website: https://www.gem-beta.org/public/DownloadMeasure.aspx?mid=1348 [accessed 7 May 2013].

the one or two perfect descriptors, but is more akin to composing a picture, choosing descriptors based upon their interactions with other terms that are also selected. A 'burning numbness' or a 'shooting stabbing' pain convey more detail about the sensation than single terms like 'hot' or 'insistent' are able to because meaning develops in the space between the terms chosen.

The special status that Scarry bestows upon pain is largely based upon a complex slippage between physical sensation and conscious perception. Scarry claims that

> contemporary philosophers have habituated us to the recognition that our interior states of consciousness are regularly accompanied by objects in the external world, that we do not simply 'have feelings' but have feelings *for* somebody or something […] If one were to move through all the emotional, perceptual, and somatic states that take an object – hatred for, seeing of, being hungry for – the list would become a very long one.[7]

Scarry suggests that we have become habituated to projecting our interior states outwards, towards objects in the phenomenal world, to the extent that we are unable, or unwilling, to divorce the interior state from the external object. The human body is, however, capable of generating interior states, of fear, euphoria, love or pain, without the presentation of concomitant objects: this is a constituent element in the definition of psychosis.[8] What psychotic conditions reveal is that internal states are not ineffably tied to physical objects, that the physical body can indeed feel hate, see and be hungry without the pre-existence of objects onto which these states can be projected. When Scarry claims that pain 'unlike any other state of consciousness – has no referential content' she promotes it above the level of other bodily sensations.[9] Her conception of those other sensations, however, is misconstrued. Pain has no absolute referential content, but neither does love nor hate.

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[7] Scarry, p. 5.
[8] The term psychosis is invoked here in its strict medical sense to indicate a psychiatric condition that results in a skewed or entirely absent comprehension of objective reality. As such, a psychotic is entirely able to *perceive* a highly specified emotional state or event without ever having *sensed* it physically. The perception that psychotics are accustomed to is, therefore, conscious, socially imbued and entirely divorced from their material existence and their environmental surroundings.
[9] Scarry, p. 5.

It is Scarry's presumption that pain is an exceptional state which leads her to the conclusion that it constitutes an unsharable experience. In Scarry's view, the internal state is isolated and eternally imprisoned within the boundaries of the perceiving body as it cannot be tied to an external object.[10] There is some validity to this notion: because of the necessarily limited nature of human verbal communication and the fact that language is descriptive, occurring after the initial sensation, there is something of a space between what is felt and what is communicated. As the McGill pain questionnaire demonstrates, descriptions of pain are never entirely accurate as the sensation has so many composite facets and any account demonstrates a loss of sensory richness in favour of perceived accuracy of communication. Bodily pain of any variety is an affirmation of material existence and, regardless of its origin, is undeniable for the sufferer. Because the sufferer cannot communicate the true nature of their pain, however, the observer is perpetually in a state of wonderment, pondering the precise nature and extent of the apparent suffering. Yet despite this seeming inability to communicate the exact phenomenal experience of pain, representations of the sensation persist in many cultural artefacts including, as Susan Sontag notes, Christian iconography, wartime photography and even contemporary advertising.[11]

Scarry sees in pain's resistance to language an ability to 'obliterate all psychological content'.[12] It is a physical sensation that overruns and eclipses the 'higher order' reasoning that constitutes conceptions of 'social life'. Reducing language to guttural cries, pain isolates the individual within intense bodily affect that, Scarry claims, 'actively destroys [language]' as it '[nullifies] the claims of the world'.[13] Pain isolates the individual from society, contradicts all notions of civility, human rights and compassion as it renounces the psychosocial world. The body in pain is a body reduced, denied its order in civilisation: pain '(even if unconsciously) self-consciously and explicitly announces its own nature as an undoing of civilization,

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[10] That is to not say, however, that empathy is implausible in Scarry's model. On the contrary, the empathic connection between the sufferer and the observer is what overcomes the inability to communicate the specific, embodied and subjective experience of pain. In Scarry's framework, the sensation becomes transmuted to a significant sociocultural symbol – an expression of 'pain' rather than the sensation itself – in order to be shared through the empathic understanding of that significance.
[11] Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2003), p. 71.
[12] Scarry, p. 34.
[13] Scarry, p. 4; p. 33.

acts out the uncreating of the created contents of consciousness'.[14] The body that opens *Martyrs* is a de-territorialised mosaic of sensation, isolated from 'the human' (that is, the sociocultural identity of 'human' that sets the species apart from the animals with which we share the Earth) by its inability to communicate. That Lucie flees through a deserted industrial estate – a symbol of First World civility and human advancement that invokes largely negative connotations in the post-industrial age – exacerbates this isolation and social abandonment.

In the pointed representation of pain engendered by the injured body, the psychosocial world is denied by the all-encompassing nature of the sensation, and yet it is precisely this denial that Scarry identifies as the communicative force behind such depictions:

> this phenomenon in which the claims of pain are eclipsed by the very loss of world it has brought about is a crucial step in the overall process of perception that allows one person's physical pain to be understood as another person's power. [15]

What Scarry outlines is a fluid process whereby the immediacy of the material body in the felt experience of pain is augmented by the dynamics of observing. Pain is an incredibly personal and subjective experience, directly accessible only to the sufferer. The observer must, therefore, witness only the external manifestations of the internal sensation – wounds, weeping, vocalisations, panic and escape. Through the viewer, the representation of pain necessarily disassociates itself from the experience of the sufferer and concentrates upon the psychosocial significance of pain as a de-civilising gesture. Represented pain most often, and most obviously, seeks to represent the effects of the sensation rather than the (unsharable) sensation itself. The appearance of pain takes meaningful precedence over the material reality of sensation in a move that echoes the dematerialising function of the spectacle examined by Guy Debord. It is in this manner that, as Susan Sontag claims, pain and the process of its infliction 'turns anybody subjected to it into a thing […and…] can exalt someone subjected to it into a martyr or a hero'.[16]

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[14] Scarry, p. 38.
[15] Scarry, p. 37.
[16] Sontag, p. 11.

Pain is intimately connected to power. The act of inflicting pain – violence – is thus frequently intrinsic to sociocultural models of control. René Girard denotes violence as a crucial factor in religious control, both as an antithetical aim and a means to achieving it. 'Religion invariably strives to subdue violence […] Paradoxically, the religious and moral authorities in a community attempt to instil nonviolence […] through the application of violence'.[17] The reflexive aim of religious violence – including the depictions of Christ's human suffering, for example – is to quell violence through threat, culminating, of course, in the wrath of God himself. *Martyrs* invites religious interpretations in both name and iconography, despite presenting an unorthodox account of spiritual belief. Although the protagonist-cult demonstrates no clear affiliation to a specific religion, later iconography aligns their martyred victim with the crucifixion of Christ. Alongside the use of pain in religion, Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* offers detailed analysis of the ways in which violence has become 'a political tactic', and claims that its strategic application in the form of torture has developed into 'a technique […] not an extreme expression of lawless rage'.[18] It seems accurate, therefore, to claim that 'the image of the body in pain animates and makes possible a whole host of political activities'.[19]

Yet, if that were the extent of pain's communicative value, if it exclusively represented a hierarchy of power mobilised by controlling forces – be it religion, politics or something else entirely – one would expect the impact of images of pain to be highly individuated between cultures, to be localised or targeted, and to diminish over time. As Sontag writes of World War II photography, 'for a long time some people believed that if the horror could be made vivid enough, most people would finally take in the outrageousness, the insanity of war'.[20] That, however, does not seem to be the case as images of extreme pain persist in news reporting, photography, performance art, syndicated reality television (including The Crime and Investigation Network, and Sky TVs 'ID' channels), advertising campaigns including the NSPCC adverts noted by Sontag herself, viral internet images and videos including the

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[17] René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. by Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), p. 20.
[18] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1991), p. 23; p. 33.
[19] Elizabeth Dauphinée, 'The Politics of the Body in Pain: Reading the Ethics of Imagery', *Security Dialogue*, 38 (2007), 139-155 (p. 139).
[20] Sontag, p. 12.

executions of political figures and hostages, and internet 'shock' sites such as BestGore.com. The legitimacy and apparent universality of pain as a medium of communication is undeniable. The persistence of images of pain in disparate sociocultural contexts suggests that such images have an irrecoverable immediacy – that they are connected to some structure of comprehension that continues to bridge the problematic space between the physiological sensation and its representation. There is something inherently meaningful about pain – something that bestows upon representations the ability to function as a cogent method of sociocultural control. This immediacy, I propose, originates from the nature of the sensation itself: pain is a synergy of physiological, psychological, emotional and sociocultural influences that has immense evolutionary significance. Moreover, it is the sense that is most explicitly irreducible to any one of its constituent elements.

There is little doubt in the mind of the viewer that the opening scene of *Martyrs* depicts a body in pain. It echoes in her cries, in the repetition of her footfalls and is reflected in the blood that seeps from her wounds. Whether in language or feral noise, pain possesses an intrinsic social component that stems from the sensation's point of origin. All sensation is comprised of physical and psychosocial elements but pain is the sense that most explicitly combines the two facets. Pain is neither the sum of neuron circuits connecting the skin and flesh with the brain nor the sum of emotional and psychological associations of the mind but is instead a synthesis of both. Its immediacy originates in its inextricability from all imaginable spheres of human existence, irrespective of individual differences. No single living body can escape, surmount or transcend the embodied experience of pain; it is encoded in our births and our deaths and can be experienced by every cell and fibre of the human body. The phenomenal immediacy of pain can be accounted for by Ronald Melzack's theory of the sensation as a biopsychosocial phenomenon.

Melzack's 'neuromatrix' theory presents a view of pain that focuses upon what happens in the brain, rather than what is happening to various receptors in the body. The theory states that, rather than pain being conducted linearly from receptor cell to neuron cluster and then triggering an isolated pain response, the incoming information is relayed around a neuromatrix consisting of a 'widespread network of neurons that consists of loops between the thalamus and cortex [of the brain] as well

as between the cortex and limbic system', and is cross-checked against proprioceptive, interoceptive and emotional information that is simultaneously relayed around the same neural circuits.[21] The pattern of associations made between simultaneously occurring stimuli – between, for example, the relatively small pain but intense fear of needles when having an injection – produces what Melzack terms a 'neurosignature'. Each neurosignature is the characteristic pattern of brain activity that is triggered by a specific perceptive experience: it is not, for example, simply the physical pain of the needle prick but all elements of the physical and emotional state at the time of the event. This model of pain illustrates the way in which complete sensations are consciously perceived and categorised but, more importantly, it reduces *physical* pain to being one component of the pain experience thus avoiding the reduction of perception to mere physiological sensation. As Melzack notes, 'the neurosignature may be triggered or modulated by input [but] the input is only the "trigger" and does not produce the neurosignature itself'.[22]

The perception of pain disassociates itself from the sensory experience to the extent that an individual can be terrified of the 'pain' of an injection and yet comfortably sit for several hours for a tattoo artist: it is not that one experience is any more or less 'painful' but that the neurosignature is different and, therefore, elicits a different affective response. In this model pain is characterised as an *internally generated* affective state that can be, but is not necessarily, modified and altered by external stimuli. Pain is thus situated at the very interstice between body and consciousness and can be stimulated both physically and psychologically. Melzack's neuromatrix theory of pain perception not only provides a conceptual link between the apparently disparate physical and cognitive aspects of a single sensation, but also demonstrates the ways in which those aspects can be manipulated.

Melzack's theory argues for a specifically neural framework to the experience of pain that ties the surface and flesh with previous cognitive associations and experiences in a dynamic conjunction between the physical and the psychological. It also reinforces the intimate connection between the different facets of pain –

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[21] Ronald Melzack, 'Pain and the Neuromatrix in the Brain', *Journal of Dental Education*, 65 (2001), 1378-1382 (p. 1379).
[22] Melzack, p. 1380.

physiology, psychology, emotion and sociocultural influence – and demonstrates the way in which a single sensation can be concocted from many different sources. The very nature of the construction of pain as multifaceted, in turn, positively affects its ability to be represented: the expression of pain is not, indeed cannot, be limited to a simple replication of one individual facet but rather should arise through the interplay between them all. This model allows for more variety in the experience and representation of pain that does not simply rely upon weeping wounds. Tom Six's *The Human Centipede* (2009), for example, enacts a version of pain that relies predominantly upon cognitive associations of correct human gustatory function. There is very little blood or bodily fluid displayed onscreen and the parts of the human body that would generate the highest empathetic response from viewers – the surgical connections between the centipede segments – are consistently hidden from view. It is the combination of sensations that communicates pain in the opening sequence of *Martyrs*: the unsteady camera, the girl's decentred position onscreen, the lack of soundtrack, the loudness of her breathing and footfalls, the low-key lighting, her cries of desperation and the solitude of the setting accumulate and crescendo in a portrayal of pain that mimics the creation of *her* pain.

If the physical sensation of pain is comprised of a delicate dialectic between the physiological, emotional and sociocultural aspects of experience then the communication of pain through the visual medium must draw upon an equally diverse range of communicators in order to successfully convey the sensation. Looking is not enough: pain *must* be appealed to bodily, through structures of understanding that are common between viewers. Images that seek to represent the multidimensional experience of pain through vision alone render the sensation a spectre of itself. They claim to communicate 'pain' through the metonymic use of symbols – the weapon and the wound, for example – but what they actually communicate is not the *sensation* but the psychosocial significance of that instance of represented pain. Christian iconography, for example, uses human suffering as a means to generate awe and reaffirm faith: the image of Christ on the crucifix is not about his human pain so much as what His suffering represents to the Christian faith. In the following analysis it will be contended that while all representations of human pain may be viewed as metaphorically representing something else, there is a current of embodied understanding that underpins them. To be truly successful, images of pain cannot

merely be looked upon but must somehow be felt by the viewer in order for the pain itself to be communicated.

Looking/Feeling Beyond The Spectacle

Martyrs is a film concerned with the act of looking and with the legitimacy of that witnessing look. The title at once alludes to the religious violence of martyrdom and, through its Greek antecedent *martus*, to the act of bearing witness. Lucie and Anna are captured by what appears to be a cult, led by a matriarch called Mademoiselle, that is intent on producing a martyr who will be a living witness to the afterlife. Their methodology for achieving this involves the systematic torture of young women in an attempt to propel them into transcending their material existence in order to 'let go' and see 'the other side'. Often addressed as a paradigmatic example of the 'New French Extremism', *Martyrs* is perhaps the most widely theorised of the case study films explored by this thesis. Tanya Horeck and Tina Kendall group Laugier's *Martyrs* with fellow French horror films – *Switchblade Romance* (dir. by Alexandre Aja, 2003), *Inside* (dir. by Alexandre Bustillo and Julien Maury, 2007), *Frontier(s)* (dir. by Xavier Gens, 2007) and Fabrice Du Welz' *The Ordeal* (2004) – and draw an ambiguous parallel between French extremism and the Hollywood 'torture porn' cycle.[23] While I believe that the 'torture porn' label itself is ungainly, bringing connotations that do not routinely apply in equal measure to all films within its proposed remit, the similarities between the presentation of increasingly extreme violence against bodies are legitimate. Adam Lowenstein's analysis of 'spectacle horror' is particularly pertinent to this thesis although his terminology is somewhat inaccurate. Lowenstein claims that extreme films present,

> spectacularly explicit horror for purposes of audience admiration, provocation, and sensory adventure as much as shock or terror […] Spectacle horror's 'loudness' as a mode of direct, visceral engagement with viewers distinguishes it from 'quieter' forms of what we might call ambient horror, but this distinction should not mandate the negative value judgements that structure torture porn as a category.[24]

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[23] Tanya Horeck and Tina Kendall, 'The New *Extremisms*: Rethinking Extreme Cinema', *Cinephile*, 2nd ser., 8 (2012), 7-9 (p. 8).
[24] Adam Lowenstein, 'Spectacle Horror and *Hostel*: Why 'Torture Porn' Does Not Exist', *Critical Quarterly*, n.s., 53 (2011), 42-60 (p. 42).

Lowenstein recognises within this genre shift the move towards 'sensory adventure' and the visceral engagement of the viewer that is being argued for in this thesis. His alignment of this embodied viewing experience with spectacle is, however, somewhat contradictory. If, following Debord's analysis, the spectacle entails 'all that was once directly lived [becoming] mere representation' then the fact that these films engage their viewer in sensory adventure directly contradicts the dematerialising effect of the spectacle.[25] Indeed, if sensory adventure inherently includes the relocating of horror from the bodies onscreen to the body viewing – accessed through the modes of embodied understanding that have been explicated throughout this thesis – then the experience of viewing these films is intrinsically *lived*. Viewing extreme horror in an embodied fashion repositions the phenomenal experience of the film from communication of a narrative to the generation of an embodied lived experience. Tim Palmer suggests that the New French Extremism aesthetic generates

> profound, often challenging sensory experiences. In the age of the jaded spectator, the cynical cinephile, this brutal intimacy model is a test case for film's continued potential to inspire shock and bewilderment – raw, unmediated reaction.[26]

The visceral images of extreme cinema – no longer limited to French horror film, but incorporated into European and American titles such as those discussed in this thesis – accost the viewer *bodily* and engage them in a collaborative process. Reactions are 'raw' and 'unmediated' because of the phenomenal, physiological and psychological contact between the spectator and the film. Whilst this type of viewing experience remains indelibly tied to the ideology of consumption – becoming 'the next step in […] the progression of economic value' – it is, nevertheless, an evolution of the spectacle that has dominated Western culture for decades.[27] This image is not a spectre of itself, but a reflection of the consumer concealed within the appearance of

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[25] Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone, 1995), p. 12.
[26] Tim Palmer, 'Style and Sensation in the Contemporary French Cinema of the Body', *Journal of Film and Video*, 58 (2006), 22-32, p. 22.
[27] B. Joseph Pine II and James H Gilmore, 'Welcome to the Experience Economy', *Harvard Business Review*, 76 (1998), 97-105 (p. 97) <available at ebscohost.com> [accessed 13 April 2012].

the commodity: it uses the viewer's body as its vehicle of delivery in order to render the commodity-experience all the more *immediate* and, in a way, *real*.[28]

Much of the critical engagement with *Martyrs* has centred upon the extremity of its violence, and the relation of this extremity to the female form that is conspicuously at the epicentre of the narrative. Amy M. Green, for example, addresses the 'suffering and neutering' of the female form as a controlling image that encases the film. Enacting a collapse of the feminine tropes of virgin/matron/crone, Green argues that Laugier's film challenges the 'eroticisation of violence' against women often perceived in contemporary culture.[29] Indeed, the lack of sexual exploitation/sexual torture in the film creates a void: contemporary audiences are accustomed to a particular brand of violence against women in horror films, exacerbated by the exploitation and rape-revenge titles of the 1970s, including Wes Craven's almost-unpalatably eroticised *The Last House on the Left* (1972). The opening scenes of Craven's film focus upon teenager Mari approaching her seventeenth birthday in the era of 'free love'. The elderly postman arrives with cards for Mari's birthday, places them in the mailbox and soliloquises to himself about the beauty of the girl. The scene cuts to Mari in the shower, the dappled glass shower screen obscuring the fine detail of her naked body whilst leaving enough definition to her breasts and pubic area for her anatomy to be visible. Having dried and dressed, she goes to the living room where her parents are fussing and her father openly questions her about not wearing a bra, pointing out that her nipples are visible through her shirt. Mari herself later declares that she feels like a woman for the first time since her breasts filled out the previous winter. It seems that almost every character in the film is oddly obsessed with Mari's body as a signifier of her 'womanhood' and the lingering shots of her in the shower, wrapped in a towel, cupping her own breasts as she discusses the merits of braless adventures with her father (whose incessant staring at his daughter's body provokes a disconcerting atmosphere) reinforce the 'importance' of her as an object of beauty for the admiration of other people.

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[28] The 'reality' of this type of viewing experience should not be confused with a suspension of disbelief. The *viewing experience* is in the realm of the 'real', whilst the viewer engages with the events onscreen as a mediated representation and not a reality in itself.

[29] Amy M. Green, 'The French Horror Film *Martyrs* and the Destruction, Defilement, and Neutering of the Female Form', *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 39 (2011), 20-28 (p. 21).

In contrast, *Martyrs*, which also details the systematic defilement and destruction of two young women, 'assaults its audience' from the moment the scarred and bleeding body of the young girl stumbles into the frame.[30] Whilst Craven's exploitation film remains focused upon the sexual subjugation of Mari and her friend, and consistently eroticises violence by lingering upon the voyeuristic look of the perpetrator as opposed to the suffering of the victim, Laugier's film instead uses the female body as a vehicle to access bodily sensation. While it is undeniable that *Martyrs* displays horrific violence against women it differs significantly from the routinely accepted spectacular-sexualised violence against the female body that many exploitation films employ. Not only does this reinforce Lowenstein's claim for the inappropriateness of the 'torture porn' label in this context as *Martyrs* excludes sexual connotations but it also allows the violence itself – which is both brutal and unrelenting – to assume centre stage. There is no doubt that what is being questioned in this film is the dynamic of the sensorial body, and its relation to the psychosocial mind. In this manner, I wish to follow Maria Dschaak in focusing upon *Martyrs* as a film that unveils the fragility of the human body in order to 'show different ways of depriving the occidental subject of its alleged sovereignty'.[31] A key component of this unveiling of fragility is, I propose, a reiteration of encompassing bodily sensation for both the characters onscreen and the viewer. It is not just the sovereignty of the subject that is challenged by *Martyrs'* ritual destruction of the female body but the sovereignty of the notion of 'mind over matter', as well.

While *Martyrs* openly fixates upon the act of 'seeing', there is a dichotomy within the film between two types of looking – one that is supported by physiological experience and one that is not. While this separation of the look seems to replicate Scarry's claim that 'to have great pain is to have certainty; to hear that another person has pain is to have doubt', it also speaks directly to Marks' spectrum of looking. In addition, the preference for the embodied look as the true communicator of extreme states of bodily sensation also reflects the nuanced and intimate connection between physiology and psychology that is explicated by Melzack's neuromatrix theory. In order to be communicated, represented pain must replicate the neuromatrix – the web

[30] Green, p. 21.
[31] Maria Dschaak, 'Cinema du Corps' (unpublished conference paper, *Body Horror: Contagion, Mutation, Transformation*, 2013), <http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/at-the-interface/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/dschaakbhpaper.pdf> [accessed 8 July 2014], p. 2.

of connections between sensory fibres, emotion centres, memory and sociocultural associations. The opposition of looking, and the inadequacy of the spectacular gaze of the observer, are first represented within the dynamic of belief that exists between Lucie and Anna during the first section of the film.

The opening sequence shows Lucie, obviously terrified and in pain, as she flees from an abandoned warehouse (Figure 4.1, above). Her pain is undeniable and is conveyed through a combination of sensory stimulations. The look of the viewer is preceded by multiple sensations that are then confirmed when the image becomes truly visible such that vision is effectively underpinned by the other senses that first suggest pain and suffering to the viewer. This multimodal communication of pain generates a feeling of sharing, as the viewer is directly and sensationally privy to Lucie's experience. That is not to say that this scene provides a literal translation of a painful experience, but rather that Lucie's experience of pain becomes a matter of fact for the viewer.

In her subsequent relationship with Anna, Lucie does not share details of her ordeal but allows her physical scars to stand as symbols of her pain. In a process that bears the hallmarks of the spectacular image defined by Debord – wherein 'being' becomes 'having' and 'having' becomes 'appearing' as the spectacle privileges seeing over the phenomenally immediate senses of direct physiological experience (touch, taste, smell, balance) – the wounds are used 'associatively to *express* pain', where 'pain' becomes a generalised concept that is redefined by each person that views the wound.[32] Lucie's wounds are the manifestation, the appearance, of a pain no longer physiologically felt. Her scars, like Lindsay's facial wounds in *The Human Centipede*, however, represent simultaneously more and less than her experience of pain. Because they indicate the structures of power that created them and hint at the subjugation of her body in the pursuit of an external aim, Lucie's wounds are *more* than physical. In attaining this symbolic dimension, however, the wounds transcend their physicality and lose touch with the afflicted body; they become *less* than wounds as their psychosocial signification becomes more important than their sensorial reality. Through the manifestation of a sensation that *should* indicate her phenomenal

[32] Debord, pp. 16-17; Scarry, p. 16.

embodiment, she ceases to be Lucie and becomes 'the wounded'. As such, the scars do not represent her experience of pain but stand as objects that Anna views and interprets by her own definition; they become symbols of pain, but not of Lucie's pain. It is in this manner that wounds 'locate perception at the pulsing boundaries of the body' by drawing the observer's attention to the *surface* in a way that bypasses the substance of the body that underlies the skin.[33] Yet, for the viewer of *Martyrs*, as for the viewer of *The Human Centipede*, the bodily sensation incorporated into the representation of the wound bridges the gap between surface and flesh, appearance and sensation, wound and pain. Melzack's neuromatrix theory argues for a similarly intimate connection between the surface, flesh, previous cognitive associations and experiences in a dynamic and inescapable sensation that unites body and mind. Indeed, the effect of viewing only the symbolic surface of Lucie's painful experience, rather than having access to the sensation, is comparable to Anna's continuous need to look, and to see.

After Lucie finds and murders the people she holds responsible for her childhood torture, Anna arrives at the scene of the crime to assist her friend. When they meet, Lucie is clearly panicked, having been attacked by a creature while in the house. Despite her friend's insistence that 'she's here', Anna, in a statement that recalls the etymology of martyr and foreshadows her own pending martyrdom, declares 'I have to look'. Upon entering the house Anna sees nothing but the remnants of Lucie's murderous spree. Anna remains, at this stage, in the position of having to take Lucie's word when she says that these are the people who abducted and tortured her. Between scenes of Lucie and Anna cleaning the house, however, the viewer is shown Lucie's flashbacks, brief asides dominated by sensory stimulation that recall the opening scenes. In one scene the young Lucie screams and struggles against her shackles and the clanging of heavy steel restraints can be heard over her cries, but the scene remains dark with low-key lighting ensuring that visual details are more difficult to discern. While Anna is faced with looking only at the aftermath or the symbols of Lucie's pain, the viewer is once again invited to experience it through an expanded sensorium.

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[33] Mitchell B. Merback, *The Thief, The Cross and The Wheel: Pain and the Spectacle of Punishment in Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (London: Reaktion, 1999), p. 113.

There are two modes of looking encoded here. The first, Anna's, is what Marks would term optical visuality, looking for or at the metaphorical meaning of an image or symbol. The second, which is assumed by the viewer, is a mode of looking more akin to the somatic viewing engendered by *The Human Centipede* films that necessarily invokes multiple sensory dimensions simultaneously. The juxtaposition of the two modes of looking crescendos when Anna tries to help one of the victims escape after she discovers the woman is still alive. Lucie asks Anna if she ever believed her, or whether she thought her mad like the doctors, before hearing a noise behind her. The creature that attacked her earlier writhes at the top of the staircase, its insect-like yet humanoid body is covered in open wounds. It contorts its body as it moves, is possessed of excessive strength for its emaciated frame and is capable of making only guttural growls and snarls. It is an enhanced reincarnation of the young Lucie who opened the film with all aspects of its being connoting pain: its starved and neglected frame, tortured and wounded body and the inability to articulate itself all appeal to the primary shared facets of the sensation. All indicators of humanity are removed and all that remains is the tortuous, afflicted body that moves with supernatural speed and agility and attacks with brutal precision. As Lucie kneels in the hallway conversing with the creature, claiming 'they're dead, they can't hurt you anymore', Anna makes her way to the hall. A series of shots and reverse shots display two different viewpoints that alternate in quick succession. One displays the creature slicing open Lucie's arms and wrists before smashing her head into the wall repeatedly. The accompanying reverse shot, from Anna's perspective, shows no creature, but Lucie slicing her own arms, with her own hands on her head as she repeatedly harms herself (Figure 4.2, below). The creature is the manifestation of Lucie's pain, an apparition or a figment of her damaged mind. The creature is also, however, a symbolic expression of the materiality of Lucie's pain – its body is Lucie's body – and because Lucie has not shared her individual experience of pain with Anna, she is unable to comprehend the totality of Lucie's suffering. Lucie 'sees' because she feels – the viewer 'sees' the creature because they have, in some small way, been subject to sensory stimulation that manifests Lucie's experience of pain – but Anna does not 'see' because she does not feel: Anna sees only the remnants of someone else's pain without being able to access the sensation herself.

Figure 4.2: The Creature Reaches for Lucie (top) While Anna Sees Self Harm (bottom), *Martyrs*

Yet, the way in which Lucie's pain is presented to the viewer suggests that the sensation of pain can be shared through the medium of film. To return to the opening sequence, there is no question that the girl fleeing the warehouse is in pain: this is a certainty for the viewer and it is communicated through combinations of sensory stimuli that provide the foundations for the visual understanding of the film. Indeed, as the same faction that abducted Lucie takes Anna captive, the necessity of embodied knowledge to the communication of pain becomes more explicit. As Anna is slowly pushed towards witnessing, it is through a complex and sustained assault on the senses – hers and the viewer's – that her final, transcendent look is achieved.

When Anna is held captive her experience of pain is manifest in the auditory and visual dimensions as a desaturation of sensation. Anna is held underground, in a small room lined with metal plates containing only a single chair and a metal bucket in which to relieve herself. High-angled shots emphasise Anna's helplessness and her

physical isolation as no other furniture, no windows and no doors can be seen in the frame. The only sounds in these scenes are the rattling of her chains and her intermittent screams. The lighting maintains an intense low-ratio as shadows overtake the scene so that parts of Anna's body disappear into darkness with each movement she makes. Her initially frantic struggles as she rattles the chains and screams for help are frustratingly counteracted by the static nature of the camera – there is no escape. The camera that followed Lucie from the warehouse into civilisation bobbed and shook, but the camera now remains passively static as Anna fights against the unbreakable shackles. Scenes of such desperation fade into ones of absolute silence as close-up, eye line shots show Anna's bloodied body lying peacefully while somewhere in the distance metal scrapes against metal. Anna moves and the thundering of the shackles re-enters the soundscape, louder than any other diegetic effect. She tries to sit against a metal wall and knocks her shackle against it, beginning an almost deafening echo that causes her to wince and move once more. Once again, the scene fades into blackness in a way that replicates the cycle of sensory overload followed by deprivation that Anna endures. Between each sense-assaulting scene is a pause, a moment of blackness that represents Anna's moments of unconsciousness or delirium.

As the torture progresses, with the sounds of Anna being beaten appearing unnaturally loud, there is no dialogue and no musical overture. The only regular sounds are those that punctuate her existence: the metallic clatter of the ladder that signals an abuser's arrival; the rumble of the trolley that brings her pureed food; and, the scrape of the metal spoon on the metal bowl. These sounds with their sustained volume and repetitive nature signal impending pain for Anna while for the viewer they become an aggressive intrusion on the otherwise quiet scene. The enhanced volume and contrast between silence and metallic sounds mimic the importance they have for Anna: these are the sounds that signify her existence and the viewer should not and cannot ignore them. In conjunction with intrusive auditory stimulation there is also a sense of visual deprivation created for both Anna and the viewer. Anna exists in two small rooms – the room with the chair and, later, a room with a mattress – that have no windows, no decoration and no textures. She sees nobody other than those who abuse and feed her. Her body has been withdrawn from the sensorial world and contained in a state of absolute sensory deprivation. Unable to even confirm her own

existence by experiencing textures, objects or the warmth of sunlight on her skin Anna retreats into herself, seeking solace in auditory hallucinations that enable her to speak with the deceased Lucie. This landscape of desolate emptiness symbolises both the isolation of Anna's captivity and that of her pain.

The initial stages of Anna's torture are presented in a specifically sensorial manner in order to aid the communication of her suffering. It is because they are presented in such a way that the following scenes, in which she is repeatedly physically beaten and psychologically abused, do not belong to the realm of spectacle. Spectacle, in this sense, refers not only to the flamboyant representation of pain but also a state of diminished meaning or purpose. The spectacle redefines *feeling* as *seeing* and completes a subtle disembodiment of the representation of pain in which 'the perceptible world [and its phenomenal sensations] is replaced by a set of images that are superior to that world yet at the same time impose themselves as *eminently* perceptible'.[34] The facsimile comes to hold the same value as the sensation it represents whilst offering only the appearance of the sensorial qualities of the embodied experience. A commonly exploited remedy for this unfelt pain in horror films is to approach the spectacle through the medium of shock, a move that initiates a continuous process of reaching for extremity in an effort to infuse the empty image with threads of the embodied sensation. As Debord suggests, 'the spectacle is the *self-portrait* of power', an image that points to the authority it claims to hold but falls short of embodying.[35] While reliance upon spectacle may superficially 'free' the image to engage with sociocultural paradigms of control, it also disassociates the image of pain from its sensorial origins. If the spectacular image of the body in pain is not convincingly justified it loses meaning and results in the perception of an image that glorifies violence for violence's sake.

The dampening effect of spectacle horror can be seen in Robert Lieberman's *The Tortured* (2010) where an alternating focus upon bodily injury and cut sequences that display the emotional reactions of the perpetrators as their victim screams in distress, strip wounds of their signification. The narrative depicts the kidnap and murder of toddler Benjamin Landry. After his killer is convicted and sentenced

[34] Debord, p. 26.
[35] Debord, p. 19; emphasis added.

leniently the parents decide to abduct and torture him to avenge their son. One scene, for example, depicts the parents of the murdered boy crushing their victim's foot in a vice. The shot transitions through a static image of the foot waiting to be crushed, a close-up of the parents' hands as they turn the crank of the vice, a close-up of the parents' faces as they wince when the victim begins to scream, before finishing with a fleeting shot of the victim's now-mangled foot. At no point does the camera show either the injury being inflicted or the victim's reaction to the physical pain. The wounds inflicted upon the convicted killer are entirely secondary and represent neither the victim's pain, which is never addressed as the shot cuts to the perpetrators each time a new wound is inflicted, nor the pain of the parents, since the wounds they choose to inflict cannot encapsulate or represent the pain of having a child murdered. As such, wounding becomes superfluous to the narrative as it neither punishes the criminal nor reiterates the righteousness of the aggrieved parents. It is, for all intents and purposes, a diversion, an expression of emotional pain that has no real physical concomitant for the victim – who is ignored almost entirely – or for the perpetrators. Pain, in *The Tortured*, is intangible. It is indicated and gestured towards but never encapsulated or communicated to the viewer. This superfluity is reinforced by the conclusion of the film, as it is revealed to the viewer – but crucially not to the perpetrators – that they have been torturing the wrong man. Torture in this context is truly pointless.

The sensorial nature of the scenes of torture in *Martyrs*, by contrast, avoids spectacle by assaulting the viewer through the visual and auditory senses and through the associations of bodily experience garnered from those sensory manipulations. Anna's pain is not merely seen but is reproduced by the way in which the sensory impressions are combined and manipulated. If the spectacle is a self-portrait of power, it is one that *Martyrs* paints black in order to deny its spectacular influence. The image of Anna's mutilated body resists spectacle, thus posing, as Amy Green argues, an embodied challenge to the predominance of spectacle in the representation of violence against women. Here, gendered violence is reduced to its evolutionary ancestor: violence against the body – *all* bodies – in such a manner that the embodied appeal transcends the gender of the character it is inflicted upon. The denial of her gender – enacted by the shaving of her hair, the removal of her clothes and the

distortion of her facial features through physical violence – and the reinstatement of her organic body are finally completed by the removal of her skin.

Human skin 'is the most widely distributed and the most various of the organs of the body'.[36] It is also the most immediate and, as Steven Connor argues, the most absent of the human sensory organs. Documenting historical conceptions, Connor delineates three phases of philosophical attitudes towards the skin. The first saw the skin 'as the guarantee of the wholeness of the body' whilst simultaneously being 'not itself a part of the body'.[37] Seen as an ossification, an excretion even, of the flesh that differentiated itself from the human body that lay beneath, shielding it from the outside world, skin was a protection that was not part of the body *per se*. In this view, the skin embodies Julia Kristeva's abject – a me that is not me, a thing that is indistinguishable from the flesh that I know to be mine, but that is nevertheless a by-product, an excretion of the correct and proper functioning of that flesh. Kristeva's invocation of borders in the dynamics of the abject, an ambiguity in which the abject 'permeates me', speaks both to the notion of skin as excretion and the second phase of conceptualisation that Connor draws out – the skin as a membrane.[38] The notion of permeability brings an ambivalence to skin: that things can go through it stands in direct contradiction to the notion of the skin as protection. It also, however, questions the sovereignty of the human subject so often conceptualised as being 'within' the skin. If the skin is no longer solid, impermeable, strong then what happens to the human within? *The Human Centipede 2* questions the unity of the human subject in its portrayal of Martin Lomax's perpetually leaking epidermis – an excretion that secretes and ejects itself beyond the bounds of human 'decency'. The third phase Connor identifies sees the 'general functions and connections of the skin [restored]' but not without the influence of the previous conceptualisations: 'first a screen, then a membrane, and finally […] a milieu: the skin becomes a place of minglings, a mingling of places'.[39] The skin remains the abjected 'not me', a membrane that contains (though never completely), but now it comes to be what it is, as well: a sensory organ, the point at which the subject comes into contact with everything that

[36] Steven Connor, *The Book of Skin* (London: Reaktion, 2004), p. 27.
[37] Connor, p. 26.
[38] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 11; Connor, p. 26.
[39] Connor, p. 26.

is external. Laura U. Marks' adoption of the term haptic is intended to invite associations with touch, a sense enabled and encapsulated by the skin, as the principal and primary mode of tactile engagement with the world. My own development of the concept of the viscerally somatic image hopes to reunite the sense of skin evoked by *haptic* with the anatomy that lies beneath. No sense operates in isolation, no milieu can be contained and no part of the human body is entirely distinct. Indeed, no part of the phenomenal world exists in absolute isolation. That *Martyrs* climaxes with the removal of Anna's skin, apart from her face, forcibly reveals the centrepiece of the viewing experience.

As Anna is taken into an operating chamber to be flayed, the lighting progressively becomes higher key, perhaps mirroring Anna's supposed transcendence of her physical self toward martyrdom (Figure 4.3). The increase in light intensity as Anna is manipulated into the metal frame allows the viewer to see her injuries clearly for the first time. The consistent use of shallow focus permits individual aspects of the scene to be focused upon. Most commonly it is Anna who is in focus, her wounds bright and wet under the intense light. The viewer's eye is drawn to the contours of her injuries, the swelling of her lips, the deep crevices of the wounds on her forehead, the deep angry purple of the bruises on her legs and feet.

Figure 4.3: Progression of Lighting Changes in *Martyrs*

Like the perversely detailed images in Elias Ganster's *Gut*, the viewer is invited to spend time focusing upon the minute details of texture, colour and contour that had previously been unavailable to them due to the darkened lighting. This movement along the surface of the image constitutes a type of somatic grazing that allows the viewer to engage in the 'sensory adventure' that Lowenstein recognises in extreme films.[40] Although the somatic image does 'not invite identification with a figure so much as [it encourages] a bodily relationship between the viewer and the image', it does not follow that the somatic mode of viewing provokes a 'shallow' engagement with the multisensory aspects of the film that overlooks the often-controversial content.[41]

[40] Lowenstein, p. 42.
[41] Laura U. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. 3.

In his refusal of 'torture porn' as an adequate label for extreme horror films, Lowenstein argues for 'shifting the [critical] conversation from identification to attractions'.[42] Drawing upon Tom Gunning's definition of a cinema that 'bases itself on […] its ability to *show* something', Lowenstein presents a case study of Eli Roth's *Hostel* (2005) as a paradigmatic example of this kind of cinematic showmanship.[43] This is a brand of cinema that Gunning identifies as exhibitionistic; a quality that certainly finds expression in the bravura construction and the extreme depictions of violence in *Hostel*, undermined by a narrative weaved intricately with dark humour and a satirical interpretation of the value and effects of American consumer culture.

There is, however, an assumption that permeates Lowenstein's adoption and implementation of Gunning's terminology that directs his analysis towards conventional notions of spectacle entertainment as a refusal or denial of narrative authority. The desire of cinema to *show* something seems to be implicit in Lowenstein's reading, and yet I have argued in this thesis that contemporary horror often seeks to question the legitimacy of simply showing something to the viewer. Indeed, Gunning borrows his term from Sergei Eisenstein's disputation on the montage of attractions pertinent to theatre, adapting Eisenstein's argument in a manner that, I would suggest, elides the complexities of Eisenstein's original formulation. Whilst Gunning aligns 'attractions' with the exhibitionism of spectacle entertainment, Eisenstein's writings contain much more of an embodied inflexion, with the focus being placed upon the effect of attractions upon the viewer.

> An attraction (in our diagnosis of theatre) is any aggressive moment in theatre, i.e. any element of it that subjects the audience to emotional or psychological influence, verified by experience and mathematically calculated to produce specific emotional shocks in the spectator in their proper order within the whole.[44]

The montage of attractions that Eisenstein later applied to film was not privileging the visual spectacle over the narrative, but was rather demonstrating the symbiosis of the embodied experience of the viewer and their engagement with, and interpretation of

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[42] Lowenstein, p. 44.
[43] Tom Gunning, 'The Cinema of Attraction: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde', *Wide Angle*, 3 (1986), 63-70 (p. 64).
[44] Sergei Eisenstein, 'The Montage of Attraction', in *Sergei Eisenstein: Writings 1922-1934*, ed. by Richard Taylor (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), pp. 34-38 (p. 34).

that narrative. The aggressive moments of sensorial affect are not purposeless, as is implied in the case of the cinema of spectacle (whose signification overruns the thing signified to the point of ridicule, as in the case of *The Tortured*), but instead contribute to the effectiveness of the complete experience of biopsychosocial engagement. It was proposed in chapter two that the 'pornographication of torture' often identified in the contemporary extreme horror film enacts *bodily* fascination engendered through vision, rather than a simplistic voyeuristic optical obsession.[45] Whilst the image of Anna's flayed body generates a type of visual frenzy as it encourages the viewer to scrutinise the image, it also unavoidably incorporates modes and structures of embodied understanding in the extremity of its presentation. The harrowing details of her injuries replicate in the visual sphere the tactile bombardment of Anna's senses and this re-creation of pain opens the body onscreen and the one off screen to the visceral organicity that permeates and structures both. To claim that *Martyrs*, or any of the other films addressed in this thesis, are merely collections of attractions that detract from their narrative trajectories or the effectiveness of their representation is to do a disservice to the strategic incorporation of somatic sensation within both the narrative and the form of the films. The somatic grazing facilitated by these films creates a different, though no less effective, empathetic engagement with the image and its contents. In this dynamic the somatic image generates a physiological relation between the viewer and the film that enhances the psychosocial relationship between the viewer and the narrative. It is not that one eclipses the other but that the two come into contact in a transient exchange. Somatic sensation facilitates the comprehension of Anna's wounds as more than mere signifiers of her captivity and subjugation; it allows them to replicate and communicate the embodied experience of pain.

The removal of her skin, like the increase in light intensity during these scenes, naturally lends itself to notions of somatic visuality, extending the subversion of the body's boundary found in *The Human Centipede 2* beyond the abject and towards the monstrous. If watching a gloved hand caress a naked torso in *Gut* stimulates the sense of touch, as mirror neurons ensure that it does, then the very

[45] Steve Jones, 'The Lexicon of Offence: The Meanings of Torture, Porn and Torture Porn', in *Controversial Images: Media Representations on the Edge*, ed. by Feona Attwood, Vincent Campbell, I. Q. Hunter and Sharon Lockyer (London: Palgrave, 2013), pp. 186-200 (p. 188).

concept of skin and the removal of this protective barrier lead to the overstimulation of the viewer's tactile sense. Anna's flesh, her nerve endings, muscles and tendons are exposed and displayed in fine detail and the associated excessive stimulation is conveyed through her ambiguous facial expression. If, as Connor argues, 'all the senses are milieux, or midplaces where inside and outside meet and meld, then the skin is the global integral of these local area networks, the milieu of these milieux'.[46] The skin is the neuromatrix of the senses, the integration hub through which disparate information finds order and meaning through its continual relay between sensory organs, the brain, the mind and memory. Without her skin Anna is at once dehumanised and hyper-humanised: she is identified as monstrously abject by her exposed flesh, pulsing veins and her disturbingly affectless facial expression, and yet she is undeniably human and in a state of ultimate sensory experience. The psychosocial world in which the human subject imagines they exist is quelled by the immediate and extreme sensorial crescendo that results from the unprotected body in contact with the phenomenal world. Her matter has eclipsed her mind, symbolised by the removal of the surface that allows the body to mediate its contact with the outside world. Anna can no longer control her experiences; she is assaulted continuously by the smallest particle contacting her uncovered flesh to trigger her exposed nerve endings. She is over-stimulated, inundated by her own body – a body that is ordinarily more contained, constrained, controlled – as, in a manner of speaking, the viewer is simultaneously assaulted by their own senses in the act of bearing witness to Anna's final annihilation.

The somatic image is one that denies the primacy of vision in such a way that other sensations *must* be called upon to interpret the information presented. As Anna kneels suspended, in a position reminiscent of Christian iconography, her flayed body is overtaken by a final somatic image that begins and ends with an extreme close-up of her eye. The camera zooms in on Anna's eye, bypassing the bright red musculature that surrounds her face, the only piece of coherent skin that remains as an island atop the pulsating flesh that has become her body. As the camera zooms the periphery becomes unfocused, blurring the colour and contours of her injuries and exposed flesh as it fixates upon an isolated, glazed eye. Individual capillaries are visible on the

[46] Connor, p. 27.

surface as the zoom continues and the camera appears to enter the pupil. Discernible features fade into black, as the reflection that overlaid the iris becomes the focus of the darkened scene: a translucent glaze that gradually overtakes the entire frame. The unfocused scene is now completely swathed in a whitish-blue hue, the elements of light and shade drawing the eye across the screen from right to left, top to bottom. Still, the zoom continues, bearing down upon a single point of light within the stippled hue until it becomes a pinprick, a beacon in the centre of a black rectangle that gradually billows and grows, like a nebula in space. The soundtrack accompanying the flow of light from the centre outwards is industrial – heavy machinery moving over a concrete floor perhaps – repetitive, intrusive and almost painful in its insistence. Intercut with this heavy, low sound is another tone somewhat similar to whale song, higher and somehow cleaner, but the combination of the two produces a discord between the long, low baritone of the first and the staccato, intermittent tenor of the second. The resulting effect is one of discomfort tinged with expectation of a final conclusion, a close to Anna's, and the viewer's, suffering once and for all. The light finally brightens to envelope the screen, the higher tones overtaking the lower ones in the auditory landscape as the camera slowly zooms out again, allowing Anna's eyeball to reform before the camera's eye. Slowly but with rising clarity her face becomes visible and, as the camera completes its zoom out, the red, pulsing flesh around her face once again takes precedence.

Despite her injuries Anna displays no outward signs of pain: if the darkness signified hopelessness and suffering, then light here comes to signify her transcendence of the previous situation. The extreme invasion of the eye seems to suggest an alteration to the way in which Anna sees. Certainly, there is no question that Anna's senses are integrally comingled as her body lies in a state of consistent and extreme stimulation resulting from her bare nerve endings. In contrast to her earlier mode of looking, Anna's sight in this scene is crucially framed by her physical condition – evidenced by the reiteration of her torture performed by refocusing upon her wounds before and after the exploration of her eye – and supported in every instance by physiological sensation. Because of the systematic layering of sensation throughout the film, and the somatic nature of this final image, the viewer has received a multidimensional representation of pain that allows them to intuitively build a sensorial model. As a result of the underlying sensation that has been

effectively communicated through the medium, the final fantastical image does not detract from the brutality of the events onscreen but rather becomes the final layer of sensation. The image of Anna flayed but somehow alive becomes the skin of the film itself: the single image to which all sensation has been gradually leading. It is the ambiguity of this simple image that finally attempts to encapsulate the experience of pain.

Embodiment and Pain

The experience of pain in *Martyrs* assists in the development of a narrative that questions the sanctity of the individual and restates the influence of the physiological upon the psychosocial. *The Bunny Game*, however, is a film that on the surface presents an exploration of pain that has neither cause nor purpose beyond that of mindless torture. The film depicts a nameless prostitute, billed in the credit sequence as Bunny (Rodleen Getsic), as she sells her body in order to fund her drug addiction. After a catastrophic day in which her body and mind are subject to inhumane abuses, a nameless delivery driver kidnaps her, billed in the credits as Hog (Jeff F. Renfro). Held captive in Hog's trailer on a deserted strip of land, Bunny is physically and psychologically tortured for five days and forced to play the eponymous Bunny Game before being handed over to a man named Jonas (Gregg Gilmore). Upon the film's release in 2010 the BBFC refused it a classification, stating that

> the principal focus of the work is the unremitting sexual and physical abuse of a helpless woman, as well as the sadistic and sexual pleasure the man derives from this. The emphasis on the woman's nudity tends to eroticise what is shown while aspects of the work such as the lack of explanation of the events depicted, and the stylistic treatment, may encourage some viewers to enjoy and share in the man's callousness and the pleasure he takes in the woman's pain and humiliation.[47]

It has thus attained something of a cult status and while the film is often mentioned alongside similarly controversial extreme cinema titles – as in Steve Jones' article 'Gender Monstrosity' that simply notes the film has been banned because it

[47] BBFC, 'The Bunny Game: Rejection Explanation', *BBFC.co.uk* (n.d.) <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/releases/bunny-game-1970> [accessed 11 July 2014] (para. 3 of 5).

'graphically depicts sexual abuse' – it has received surprisingly little critical commentary.[48] Jenny Barrett addresses some of the controversies of the film, including director Adam Rehmeier's claim that the torture was improvised but un-simulated and his assertion that the film could be read as a feminist text. Drawing similarities between the performance art aspects of the film (actress Rodleen Getsic is a performance body artist who claims *The Bunny Game* to be, more than anything, an art film) and Antonin Artaud's theatre of cruelty, Barrett argues that *The Bunny Game* is 'characterised by sensation in its presentation of violence' in a manner that attracts both the 'torture porn' horror fan and the sadomasochistic pornography viewer.[49]

Whilst I agree that *The Bunny Game* is undeniably characterised by sensation, I would counter Barrett's claim for the appeal of the film. The consistent foregrounding of the tortured body through somatic images, I will argue, dilutes the pleasurable attributes of watching through the propagation of an uncomfortable viewing experience for specific (although numerable) cohorts of spectators. Furthermore, the perspective of *The Bunny Game* is predominantly focused upon the victim, precluding the portrayal of the perpetrator's 'enjoyment' of his actions. Indeed, it will be suggested that the actions of Hog are not in focus at all and it is the direct biopsychosocial effects of his actions upon his victim that the film focuses upon. In this manner, while the 'director and cast meticulously explore the minutiae of the physical and psychological abuse of a helpless woman', the events of the film are not comfortably classified as sadistic, as Barrett claims them to be, as they lack a convenient identification-point in and through the narrative.[50] *The Bunny Game* is not a traditionally pseudo-pornographic exploitation horror film despite the enmeshing of sexual activity and violence it performs. Instead, it will be proposed that the film enacts an embodied representation of unrelenting violence that questions the unity and perseverance of the human body by refusing to allow the viewer to 'imagine' the significance of the acts depicted in the narrative. Everything in *The Bunny Game* is given, and it is done so violently.

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[48] Steve Jones, 'Gender Monstrosity', *Feminist Media Studies*, 13 (2013), 525-539 (p. 526).
[49] Jenny Barrett, 'More Than Just a Game: Breaking the Rules in *The Bunny Game*', *Cine-Excess Special Issue: Subverting Senses* (ejournal, n.d.) < http://www.cine-excess.co.uk/subverting-the-senses.html>, [accessed 3 July 2014], (para. 2 of 25).
[50] Barrett (para. 4 of 25).

The film, shot entirely in monochrome, begins with a shot of a human head (Figure 4.4, below), covered in what appears to be a plastic bag. A masculine arm bearing a significant scar can be seen behind the head as it thrashes from side to side. The muffled cries of the victim, along with the disturbing stretching sound of the plastic, are heard as they attempt to breathe. Shadows swing to and fro across the frame, alternately obscuring and revealing details such as the folds in the material and the hair on the captor's chest, to emulate the swinging of a single light source overhead. With its amateur-style cinematography, *The Bunny Game* shares similarities with the haptic imagery of *The Poughkeepsie Tapes*. The swinging light moves the visual emphasis of the scene continuously, ensuring that the viewer must take in only fragments of details on each sweep that the light completes. The primacy of vision as the principal mode of cinematic communication is questioned as the disturbing sounds take over the soundscape and the movement of the shadows across the contours of the face alternately reveal and obscure the visual scene.

Figure 4.4: Adam Rehmeier's *The Bunny Game* (2010)

As the victim inhales, the plastic crudely reveals the features of the face that lies beneath in a harrowing realisation of suffering. The choice of this shot to open the narrative is significant in two ways. Firstly, it is an image of pain that is communicated through combinations of sensorial stimulations that appeal to the embodied viewer. The tone of the victim's cries as the plastic pulls into their mouth when they inhale communicates audibly the shortness of breath and accompanying panic they are perceived to be feeling. The fact that it is displayed in the centre of the frame marks the victim as the focal point of this scene, and the ensuing narrative. It also, however, problematizes the notion of 'seeing' as it is both physically difficult for

the viewer to discern what is happening and the face itself is covered in a plastic veil. The covering of the face creates a second skin, an alien layer that prohibits the body from its ordinary function: it obscures features, but retains recognisable landmarks; prevents vision, but encourages the haptic senses in its alternate blotting and revealing of the humanness beneath it as the victim exhales and inhales. The veiling of the face resists the conventional notion of 'torture porn' that is predicated on a pathological desire to see every single detail of the dismemberment and murder of the human body, refusing the viewer ocular access to the victim at what would be the pinnacle of bodily arousal.[51] Instead, the viewer is given some visual detail, some haptic detail and more auditory detail in a decontextualised image that is neither realised nor expanded upon in the film that follows.

In an inversion of Anna's flaying in *Martyrs*, the skin, which 'is the ground against which the other senses figure', has its function curtailed by the plastic covering.[52] It no longer protects or mediates contact: it merely creates pain. If 'the skin is, so to speak, the body's face' then the covering of the face can be read as a symbolic removal of the skin with the ultimate aim of dehumanising the victim.[53] While Anna's face remained, thus ensuring her body entered into the abject (me-not me), this body resists explicit identification as 'the same as me'. It oscillates on the border between the human and the abject, the body and the spectacle, whilst adhering comfortably to no single category. The human face is, according to Mary Ann Doane, 'the most articulate sector of the body' and is able to communicate the highest degree of subjective experience.[54] In addition, the face contains many of the specialised

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[51] Whilst this scene metonymically invokes the notion of erotic asphyxiation, generating an undercurrent of sexual desire that was not present in *Martyrs*, the presentation of the scene goes some way to deny the pornographication of the violence. Firstly, the monochrome colour scheme, low-key lighting and perpetually moving light source counteract the visual fascination engendered by notions of pornography. In pornographic material, as Linda Williams states, one expects to *see* 'naked bodies engaging in sexual numbers'. In this scene, however, the viewer *sees* a covered body – that is disassociated from the human form through the veiling of the face – which is clearly not in a state of sexual arousal. Secondly, and perhaps more pertinently, the viewer does not witness the perpetrator's 'pleasure' in performing the asphyxiation, which may cue the pornography viewer into accepting the erotic dimensions of inflicting pain. All markers of eroticism, pornography and pleasure are removed from this scene, and the film, as the *violence* of these acts overcomes other potential significations. Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure and the 'Frenzy of the Visible'* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. 128.
[52] Connor, p. 27.
[53] Connor, p. 29.
[54] Mary Ann Doane, *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 47.

sensory organs – the eyes, nose, mouth and ears – and is often located, particularly in horror film, as the seat of the individual's experience. All pain, all fear, in visual representation is communicated through the face and its outpouring of sensorial humanity. The opening scene of *Martyrs* used the face of Lucie – its scarred skin, wide terrified eyes and the cries that issue from it – to confirm her pain as she stumbled into the light from the abandoned warehouse. The face in the corresponding curtain-raiser from *The Bunny Game*, however, is concealed with an opaque film that obscures the features associated with human subjectivity even as it tightly hugs their contours with each breath. This denial of the victim's face objectifies them but it also refuses the actuality of the representation itself. If the human face is the body part most ostensibly '*for* the other', as Doane claims, the part most concerned with sharing experiences and knowledge, then refusing the viewer access to that face at the moment when communication of their physiological and psychological experience would seem paramount denies the notion that this image is *for the other* at all.[55] This face is unable to communicate the suffering it feels. It is unable to manifest fear in its widened, bloodshot eyes or to display the pain of asphyxia in its pallid coloration or darkened lips. The covered face cannot communicate its own sensory experience and leaves the viewer with only their own sensations as the light swings and the sound of stretching plastic fills their auditory field. If this image is not *for the other*, if it does not communicate for the other, then it must be *for me*. To the viewer this means that the image must have direct applicability to them and their own sensory experience. Like the pain the as-yet anonymous body onscreen feels, this image must be felt by the viewer and not simply seen.

The definition of the body and the recognition of the mediated body as a human being are thus problematized from the outset. The prominence of the victim's physicality in the frame, however, ensures that the body does not fade from view. The human body is, after all, a powerful conduit of understanding as George Lakoff and Mark Johnson state in *Philosophy in the Flesh*:

[55] Doane, p. 47.

> our sense of what is real begins with and depends crucially upon our bodies, especially our sensorimotor apparatus, which enables us to perceive, move, and manipulate, and the detailed structures of our brains, which have been shaped by both evolution and experience.[56]

Lakoff and Johnson suggest that the very nature of human existence and experience is defined by the qualities of a highly specific and specialised body. This body in turn allows the individual to sense and interact with the external environment in ways that are ultimately enabled and limited by the nature of that body's corporeality. The repeated representation of the body being engaged physiologically, whether through torture or sex, along with the refusal of dialogue or narrative at this point, creates a clear emphasis on bodily sensation. In a brutal fashion, *The Bunny Game* is not concerned with subjective experiences, only physiological ones. Indeed, Rodleen Getsic proclaims *The Bunny Game* to be an 'experiential gift' that is inescapably 'about torture'.[57]

While the unrelenting focus upon violence as the crux of the narrative may seem to align the film with conventional notions of 'torture porn', there are a number of key stylistic and thematic differences. As Steve Jones discusses, the torture porn label signifies much more than the combination of sex and violence 'because of the cultural power imbued in the word 'porn''.[58] The pejorative label connotes not only the pornographication of violence, which implies a valorisation of suffering in the name of entertainment, but also constructs a specific dynamic between the viewer and the image. On the one hand, the inclusion of porn assumes 'that audiences are sexually stimulated by the gore and suffering' whilst, on the other hand it works 'to illegitimate Torture Porn and demand that body horror retreats to its more 'fitting' position on the outskirts of the cultural radar'.[59] The reactionary term thus promotes a confusing confluence of associations between extreme violence, spectacle entertainment, sexual arousal, a lack of empathy, and the critical decline of sociocultural cohesion and humanitarian concern. In essence, torture porn is

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[56] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic, 1999), p. 17.
[57] Rodleen Getsic, 'My MonsterPiece: An Artfilm', *Cine-Excess Special Issue: Subverting Senses* (ejournal, n.d.) <http://www.cine-excess.co.uk/subverting-the-senses.html> [accessed 3 July 2014], para. 4; para. 7 of 65).
[58] Jones, 'The Lexicon of Offence', p. 190.
[59] Jones, 'The Lexicon of Offence', p. 188; p. 191.

constructed as symptomatic of a self-destructive society that enjoys the grand spectacle of violence displayed in these films. It is in the relationship between the viewer and the image that *The Bunny Game*, and all the films explored in this thesis, most strenuously denies the torture porn categorisation. *The Bunny Game* is unremittingly attentive to the suffering of Bunny's body, but it is the way in which the images of the film make contact with the viewer that is 'the point' of the film. Torture is not merely a visual spectacle but is instead communicated through the viewer's sensorium in order to stimulate a bodily fascination with, and to provoke the questioning of, the contemporary experience of spectatorship.

Just as *Martyrs* manipulated sensory and associational cues through cinematography in order to convey pain, so too does *The Bunny Game*. The choice of a monochrome scheme for the film at first signifies Bunny's disassociation from physical reality but later becomes indicative of a more extreme enactment of the visual desaturation in *Martyrs* that allowed the tortured body to stand alone in the cinematic frame. In *The Bunny Game*, the monochrome scheme enacts the physical response to pain that focuses attention only on essential qualities of the environment: colour would not be a significant quality to a body in extreme pain. Both applications indicate that the body takes precedence over the external world in cases of extremity such that, as Scarry states, 'the body utterly [nullifies] the claims of the world'.[60] On a practical level, a monochrome scheme allows for higher degrees of contrast both between and within shots. When Hog rapidly flashes a bright light in Bunny's eyes the high contrast between absolute blackness and incandescent whiteness is more intense than the coloured grey to yellow alternative (Figure 4.5). This becomes significant when considering the nature of bodily pain and the fact that the overstimulation of any sense will generate a pain reaction. As the conditions of the film mimic those of Bunny's plight, both Bunny and the viewer have a superficially comparable reaction to this overstimulation.

[60] Scarry, p. 33.

Figure 4.5: Visual Contrast and Overstimulation Mirrors Bunny's Painful Experience, *The Bunny Game*

This kind of sensory contrast is also deployed in the auditory field as incredibly loud or distorted sound is set against absolute silence. The use of metal music as an overture at the beginning and end of the film reflects the genre's tendency towards dissonance and distortion and lends an affinity to those emotions that distort physical reality. The violence of sound is perhaps most evidently manifested in a montage segment detailing aspects of Bunny's torture (Figure 4.6, below). The rapidly changing scenes are punctuated by a heartbeat rhythm sounded by Hog driving a knife into the thick wooden floor of the trailer. The resulting staccato crash is high in the sound mix and can be heard above the overture music and Bunny's screaming. Startling in its volume, repetition, tone and auditory brutality, the sound becomes a measure of Bunny's pain and fear.

Figure 4.6: Bunny's Torture Montage, *The Bunny Game*

The elements of colour, contrast, sound and the evocative content of the narrative are further displaced and manipulated through the consistent use of montage editing and temporal disruption. The overt and effective use of montage recalls Sergei Eisenstein's montage of attractions, while the use of visual and haptic imagery encourages the viewer to move over the surface of the film frame. Together with the auditory accompaniment that alternately punctuates and heightens the atmosphere of helplessness, the somatic mode of viewing is evoked as the montage not only links images but 'different spheres of feeling' as well.[61] The rhythmic nature of the editing and the somatic nature of the images ensure that the viewer must assemble them manually into some form of coherence. These are not moments of formal showmanship that are 'complete within [themselves]' but rather moments to be constructed that 'depend upon something relative, the reactions of the audience' for the realisation of their potential to develop the narrative.[62] In other words, this is not exhibitionist cinema, as Adam Lowenstein may term it, as it lacks the quality of engaging in bravura cinematic techniques for their own purpose. It is not exaggeration or pomposity of showmanship as the adoption of such techniques enhances and furthers the experience of viewing past the superficial enjoyment of spectatorship. This proves to be a fruitful technique for approximating Bunny's experience of pain as each individual shot functions in a similar way to the McGill Pain Questionnaire adjectives. Each disjointed frame points to a single facet of pain, the total of which provides a matrix of associations that approximates Bunny's painful experience. Hog flashing bright lights into Bunny's eyes represents an affective-sensorial quality of pain that can be described as blinding while his screaming in her face represents an affective-evaluative quality of pain connected to fear. Thus the facets of physical sensation, affective evaluation, autonomic sensation (sickening pain, for example), brightness, constriction and temperature are addressed momentarily through a combination of seemingly disarrayed and disconnected scenes.[63]

The scenes of Bunny's torture occupy two thirds of the 1 hour 16 minute run time and are consistently harrowing. Bunny, like Anna in *Martyrs*, is chained and left in the darkness of a trailer for long periods. She is screamed at and slapped,

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[61] Sergei Eisenstein, *The Film Sense* (London: Faber and Faber, 1981), p. 63.
[62] Sergei Eisenstein, 'The Montage of Attractions', p. 34.
[63] The consistent focus upon the *victim* during these montages resists the notion of voyeuristic or sadistic enjoyment as the viewer is almost as blind to what is happening, and why, as Bunny.

bombarded with light, darkness and noise. Her head is shaved and she is forced to watch video footage of other women being tortured by Hog. Her mouth is clamped open with what appears to be a surgical instrument and litres of alcohol are poured down her throat. On occasion she is taken out of the trailer and forced to crawl naked through scrubland on a leash. She is made to play the Bunny Game whereby she, wearing a bunny mask and straight jacket, must run from her captor who is wearing a pig mask and brandishing a whip (Figure 4.7). Represented by a frantic montage sequence set to imposing metal music, this surreal game concludes with Bunny crying in Hog's arms. She is repeatedly suffocated with plastic bags before, in one final act of torture, she is made to believe she is free only to be captured and subjected to a mock crucifixion.

Figure 4.7: The Eponymous Bunny Game

The iconography of Bunny's crucifixion implies a religious aspect to her torture that recalls the final transcendent scene of *Martyrs*. René Girard has noted that religious violence is often paradoxically used to breed placidity in its subjects – indicated by Anna's strange serenity and nimbus at the conclusion of *Martyrs* and Bunny's disempowered state as she cries in Hog's arms following her crucifixion in *The Bunny Game* – and the inclusion of religious symbolism brings into question the

purpose of Bunny's torture. In this particular recreation, Hog acts as a symbol of the religious power structure – holy man, church, god – that seeks to control all aspects of Bunny's life and body. Death is not the aim, as it is in many of the 'torture porn' films: it is the systematic de-construction and control of the captive that is the aim. Just as religion might wish to train but ultimately retain its disciples, so too does Hog wish to 'keep' Bunny. In a complete denial of the sovereignty of the subject, Bunny must subordinate every aspect of her existence to her captor and it is this process that is the focus of the film. Bunny's almost-continual position in the centre of the frame, even during moments of extreme violence and depravity, forcibly foregrounds the notion that violence is not merely 'happening' but it is happening *to her*.

For Bunny, as for Anna, this subordination to another includes a partial refutation of her womanhood in the exchange of psychosocial notions of 'gender' for a more primal notion of *organicity*.[64] Whilst Anna's de-gendering was prefigured by the lack of sexual violence, and epitomised by the removal of her skin, Bunny's forced subjugation is enacted through the gender identity that is created in the first section of the film: her bodily sensation is accessed through the prism of her womanhood. Bunny's gender is emphasised by her choice of profession. As a prostitute she works within an ambiguous hierarchy of power in which she may be seen as simultaneously empowered (making her own choices) and oppressed (a slave to her clients, her addictions and a capitalist economy that makes a commodity of the body).[65] It is also a profession that engages the body in the satisfaction of physiological desires, 'moves' the body as Linda Williams argues, and subsequently

[64] I wish to reiterate a crucial distinction here between the facts of physiology and the social construction of gender roles. 'Woman' is a category that is constituted by the social order of the society in which it is used. As such, what it means to be a woman in one society can be radically different to what the same category means in another society. This social category is superficially attached to female physiology in a way that has seen the concepts of biological sex and sociological gender become interchangeable. The developing transgender and gender non-conformance social movements are, however, increasingly calling into question the legitimacy of this equivalence between physicality and sociocultural gender roles (see Martine Rothblatt, *Apartheid of Sex* (London: Rivers Oram, 1995)). When I claim that Bunny and Anna are de-gendered, it is the sociocultural aspects of their gender roles that I refer to, not their biological sex.

[65] Kate Hakala of #notyourrescueproject has collated social media comments from sex workers regarding the continued campaigns to 'liberate' them from their chosen industry. The comments reflect both the assumptions that sex workers are oppressed by their profession and that they desire/need rescuing from themselves, and their clients, and the sex workers' rebuttal of such stereotypes. 'Sex Workers Declare They're #notyourrescueproject With New Twitter Campaign', *Nerve* (3 January 2014) <http://www.nerve.com/entertainment/web/sex-workers-declare-theyre-notyourrescueproject-with-new-twitter-campaign>, [accessed 7 January 2014].

aims to 'move' the body of the observer/viewer too.[66] As her profession moves the bodies of her clients and the viewer, however, it subjects Bunny's body to a dematerialising force as she becomes a tool, a cipher for the fulfilment of others' pleasure at the expense of her own. She enters into the 'history of power' encased in the connotations of pornography as she moves from one client to the next in the first section of the film.[67] Her engagement is not merely enacted through connotation, but is also reinforced through sensory stimulations.

Following the scene of the obscured, suffocating human head, the viewer is presented with a short 'montage of attractions' that details Bunny's daily life. Accompanied by a grating industrial metal track that assaults the viewer's ears and mirrors the visual discontinuity of the montage technique, the scenes transition bluntly from one client to the next. Interspersed are scenes of Bunny in hotel bathrooms, inhaling cocaine, contorting her face as she looks at her reflection and breaking down in tears. The monochromatic colour scheme achieves a measure of visual desaturation that is heightened by the short scenes which are spliced together. There is very little dialogue and the viewer still does not know who, or what, they are watching. At the crescendo of the montage is a scene in which Bunny passes out after servicing a client. Having already paid for his gratification, the client nevertheless seizes the opportunity before him and rapes Bunny while she remains unconscious. The sense of disempowerment that is first implied by prostitution is amplified by the overwhelming sensory contrasts, generating an impression of helplessness that is epitomised by the violation of her unconscious body. At all points, the events of the film are underpinned by the sensory stimulations offered to the viewer such that the effective use of prostitution as a symbol for the subjugation and control of Bunny's body is built upon the foundations of bodily sensation. Whilst this amplifies the effectiveness of the narrative, the continued emphasis upon *her* body, and not the bodies of her clients (the viewer is predominantly shown Bunny's head/face as she performs her duties), resists the temptation for the narrative to overrun the affective elements of the film, or to lose sight of its embodied origins and descend into exploitation.

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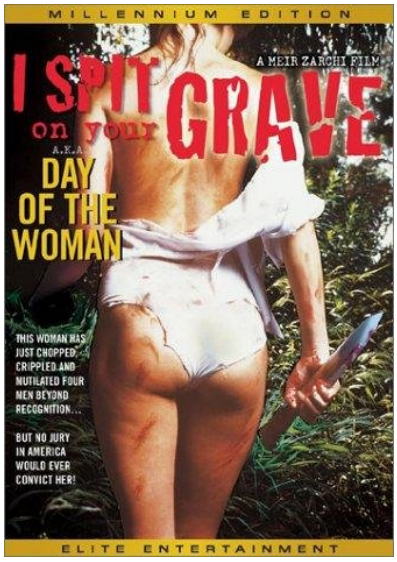
[66] Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure and the 'Frenzy of the Visible'* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. xv.
[67] Williams, p. 14.

Uniting psychosexual depictions of male virility with the persecution of the (usually) female victim, exploitation films – including *The Last House on the Left* (dir. by Wes Craven, 1972) and Meir Zarchi's *I Spit On Your Grave* (1978) along with their respective remakes in 2009 and 2010 – typically exploit the character archetypes they utilise to deliver their tenuous plot. The films usually depict a troubled relationship between the sexual exploitation of the female victim and the phallic violence later inflicted upon the perpetrator. The cover art for Zarchi's *I Spit On Your Grave*, which was replicated almost perfectly for Steven R. Monroe's 2010 remake, presents a typically conflicted image: the half naked body of a female stands in the middle of the image, she is smeared with blood and her clothes are torn exposing both her torso and her buttocks (Figure 4.8). Her exposed body is provocative as what remains of her clothes cling to her in a way that emphasises her sexual attractiveness. In her hand she holds a bloodstained knife that questions the origins of the blood that also covers her body yet originates from no obvious wound: is it hers, or her victims'? It seems the sexual appeal of the victim is being invoked even before the film has begun which poses a troubling relationship between this image and the subsequent representation of rape.

Figure 4.8: Meir Zarchi's *I Spit On Your Grave* (1978)



In Zarchi's original, Jennifer's body is implicated to have aroused her attackers into committing their crime and the continued emphasis upon the roundness of her buttocks, the slimness of her figure and her conventional beauty seems to accentuate this claim. She is raped because she is an attractive female. While *The Bunny Game* contains explicit scenes of sex, violence and the persecution, degradation and exploitation of its victim that are comparable to Zarchi's film, it differs from such exploitation titles in two significant ways. Firstly, it provides a viewing experience that is weaved from a tapestry of sensory stimulations of the ilk found within its montage segments. Secondly, it maintains a distinctive proximity to the victim's body throughout the entirety of her suffering.

Zarchi's *I Spit On Your Grave*, in its uncut format depicts the pursuit and repeated rape of a young woman, Jennifer, by four men who seem to regard her as sport. Each scene of sexual violence alternates between shots that display the victim, restrained by the men or attempting to flee through woodland, and close-up shots of the perpetrators' faces as they tether and rape her. The facial expressions of the perpetrators unambiguously portray a distinct pleasure gained from their actions as their victim screams. Perversely, the original cut-version passed by the BBFC all but eradicated the presence of Jennifer's body during scenes of her rape – replacing footage of her naked body, deemed to 'eroticise or endorse sexual assault', with repeated shots of the perpetrators' enrapt looks at their victim and each other.[68] What results is an uncomfortable emphasis upon the emotional state of the perpetrators as they perform, or voyeuristically watch, acts of violence against a victim that is ambiguously absent. Figure 4.9, below, shows a comparison in shot composition and editing sequences between Zarchi's original film (the BBFC-censored version), Steven R. Munroe's remake and Rehmeier's *The Bunny Game* during comparable rape scenes.

[68] BBFC, 'I Spit On Your Grave', *BBFC.co.uk*, (n.d.) <available at: http://www.bbfc.co.uk/case-studies/i-spit-your-grave> [accessed 11 July 2014] (para. 3 of 8).

Figure 4.9: Zarchi's *I Spit On Your Grave* (L), Monroe's *I Spit On Your Grave* (C), Rehmeier's *The Bunny Game* (R)

Zarchi and Monroe's rape scenes contain significantly more close-up shots of the perpetrators' faces, usually shown centrally or positioned in the optical field in a way that results in visual balance throughout the shot. In addition, the repeated focus upon the eyes of the rapist during the act indicates a bias towards *their* emotional or physical activity. Carol Clover argues that horror is preoccupied with eyes, and more specifically with 'eyes watching horror'.[69] As the camera probes the countenances of the rapists in both versions of *I Spit on Your Grave*, it fixates upon *their look* as they watch the horror that they perform. The isolation of the eyes of the perpetrators – amplified in Zarchi's film by Matthew's magnifying lenses and in Monroe's by Stanley's obsessive recording of the crime – foreground the voyeuristic-sadistic elements of violence in a way that constructs Jennifer's rape as violence performed by her attackers. Arguably, the repeated display of the assailants could be seen as conforming to the victim-identified camera work Clover finds in the 1980s slasher film, demonstrating the disempowerment of the victim by showing the attack from her perspective. The specific angles of both Zarchi and Monroe's camera position, however, deny the complete and convincing assimilation of camera and victim. The shot focuses upon Matthew as he rapes Jennifer (still 3 in Zarchi's sequence, still 4 in

[69] Carol Clover, *Men, Women and Chain Saws* (London: BFI, 1992), p. 167.

Monroe's) but in both instances the character does not look directly at camera as, for example, Michael Myers does when John Carpenter's camera assumes Laurie Strode's victim-position. Instead, Matthew's gaze is directed slightly to the left of where the victim is presumed to be. Situated part way between third-party omniscience and first-party identification, the camera behaves as the attackers are shown to: it assumes a proximal position from which to voyeuristically watch *the attackers* as they in turn watch each other. Jennifer is occluded from her own rape.

In *The Bunny Game*, however, the victim remains in a relatively stable and central position during her rape. Despite being unconscious, and thus unable to resist or cry out as Jennifer does, Bunny nevertheless remains the principal focus of the scene as it unfolds. The third-party camera position remains consistent, and close-up shots show parts of Bunny's body and face as her rapist remains at the periphery. As a result this scene explicitly documents the rape *of Bunny*, rather than the sexual gratification of her rapist. This victim-centred approach is further reinforced by the lack of subsequent scenes featuring the nameless assailant as the aftermath of Bunny's rape remains focused upon her.

The Bunny Game disallows the wilful ignorance of the victimised body that *I Spit On Your Grave* propagates. Bunny is nearly always in the frame, in the foreground, at the centre. After she is kidnapped the viewer does not watch the actions of Hog, as Zarchi's viewer watches the actions of the rapists (and only later those of the victim-turned-murderess), the viewer watches the effects of Hog's actions on Bunny. Here is a body that forges a living from its sexuality, its sensuality, and here is its progressive annihilation. None of which can, should, or will be hidden from the viewer. Everything is *in view*, every inch of Bunny's body, every moment of her suffering, but it is not merely visible. This is not an ocular foray into the degradation of the female form; this is eminently and immediately perceptible, felt by the viewer in a way that re-enacts Bunny's undeniable suffering. Consequently, labelling *The Bunny Game* as an exploitation or torture porn film is a reactionary tactic that seeks to disavow the extremity of the violence and the embodied nature of the viewing experience. It does foreground sex and violence but I would argue that *Hog's* violence is not necessarily sexual *per se*. He certainly does not appear to receive the type of voyeuristic-sadistic pleasure from his actions that Jennifer's rapists get from theirs.

Furthermore, the composition of shots and camera positions do not encourage the voyeuristic fascination that is typically associated with exploitation cinema. Where *I Spit On Your Grave* mimetically encourages the extra-diegetic viewer to emulate the masterful voyeurism of the inter-diegetic viewer, *The Bunny Game* presents a sequence of events with comparable objectivity. Hog's aim is not to gain gratification but to enact his victim's complete destruction and it is this that *The Bunny Game* documents. *The Bunny Game* uses the combination of sex and violence because the two embodied activities share affective features of the arousal of the human body. Bunny's body is taken through a spectrum of stimulation that explicates the innate contradictions that can be discovered in psychosocial concepts including femininity, prostitution, rape and violence.

In contrast to *I Spit on Your Grave* and *The Last House on the Left*, *The Bunny Game* redefines rape as a 'violent assault with intent to injure, humiliate and degrade *the victim*', rather than as a mode of 'sexual release' for the perpetrator.[70] It is not a film about sexual violence as such, but about violence in its ossified, invulnerable form. Rape is a violent act that contravenes many of the conceptual understandings of the body: it is an invasion of the fortress-body, a denial of the protective-body, an attack on the psychological-subject that denies their ability to choose and to be left in peace. Rape is an effective form of torture because it mobilises the victim against themself; it uses their body and mind to produce the intolerable pain associated not just with the physical act of rape but with the psychological one too. The genders of the bodies involved enact that violence, reproduce it within their social definitions (female/male, victim/perpetrator, submissive/dominant) but they do not encompass it. The gender dynamic between the male perpetrator and the female victim is mobilised through the somatic image in a way that draws upon a particular neuromatrix of associations – bodily sensation, psychosocial knowledge, cultural referencing, genre expectations, gender dynamics, power hierarchies, moral judgments – to produce a multidimensional communication of *pain* that is indelibly located not just within the victim's body but within the viewer's body as well. The experience is not directly comparable to that shown onscreen but the viewing experience is, nevertheless, distinctly disquieting and uncomfortable.

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[70] Myra MacDonald, *Representing Women: Myths of Femininity in the Popular Media* (London: Edward Arnold, 1995), p. 187; emphasis added.

It is perhaps telling that the BBFC deemed *I Spit On Your Grave* passable after nearly 8 minutes of cuts but failed to extend the opportunity to resubmit *The Bunny Game* for classification. I would suggest that part of this reasoning lies not within the content of the film but within the way it interacts with its viewer. When pain is embodied it noticeably augments the effect and affect of the narrative it performs. Somatic images infused with pain no longer allow the viewer to rationalise the filmic experience or the narrative as a fictive experience, a representation of an unreality. The film becomes semipermeable as violence seeps through the surface of the image and onto (into) the viewer through their indelible experience. *The Bunny Game* is a film about torture and, to a certain extent, it extends a torturous experience to its viewer as it denies them solace from the violence inflicted upon Bunny. It overlooks the traditional cinematic trope of searching for the response or gratification of the perpetrator and simultaneously denies any reasoning for the events of the narrative, irrespective of how thinly veiled it may be. All that remains are the remnants of Bunny – organic, annihilated and undeniable – wrapped in the trappings of film and presented to the viewer as Rodleen Getsic's enigmatic 'experiential gift'.

Conclusion – Once More, With Feeling

The previous four chapters have been devoted to answering the following question: what happens when we watch a horror film? This seemingly simple enquiry shrouds the complexities of an intricate biopsychosocial process that unfolds phenomenally and subjectively within the individual viewer. A number of answers can be offered with superficial legitimacy. We enter a distinctly psychological space and interact with a socially defined cultural artefact alongside others of our social group. We engage as a consumer within the wider capitalist economy. We participate in sociological power hierarchies that are reinforced through the narratives we watch and the very mechanics of the industry that produce them. We sit alone in front of our televisions or computer screens and engage in escapism, indulging in a fictional narrative to pass the time. Each response begins with the same subject – 'we', the viewer – yet each ends with a different intellectual concept – 'socially defined cultural artefact', 'sociological power hierarchies' or 'creative escapism' that seems to bypass the common denominator. There is a conspicuous body-shaped hole in the world of film theory: a hole that this thesis has striven to fill. The discussion has sought to refocus critical attention upon the viewer's corporeal form, their material presence and its formative influence upon 'the film experience'. The following concluding chapter will seek to finalise the conceptual framework of the thesis in order to lay bare the sensorial tapestry of the corporeal viewer. In doing so, it will endeavour to underscore the ways in which physiology underpins and guides the complex and nuanced psychological processes usually ascribed to the viewing experience. It will also explore the implications of this somatic framework for film theory more broadly and the other avenues of exploration that this project might open.

Somatic Viewing

It was suggested in the introduction that one of the dominant critical paradigms for addressing horror film – psychoanalysis – can be viewed as an exploration of the mind 'from "within", from the first person perspective of what it

feels like to be a mind, a living experiencing subject'.[1] Situated within the subjective consciousness of the viewer, the psychoanalytic paradigm looks out towards the film within the context of the sociocultural and psychological environment. As the viewer watches and makes sense of the film, the psychoanalytic reading analyses that *sense-made* in terms of the constitution of the individual psyche and seeks to answer the question of what is important to this viewer in this culture within this sociocultural role. The critic, like the individual that they hope to theorise, is 'directed towards an "outer world", and […they…] reflect psychologically on [the] Ego and its experience'.[2] While the viewer is directed towards the 'outer world' of the film, however, they are also subjected to the sensorial world of the film, a world that reaches out and phenomenally stimulates the viewing party. Traditionally, the critic is situated within the cognitive mind of the viewer – a prime position to consider what the viewer may think or how they may interpret a film. This consideration is necessarily focused upon the psychosocial influences that impact upon the ways in which an individual conceptualises and organises the plethora of information in any given phenomenon. What it seems to overlook, however, are the ways in which the viewer's sensorial body – both now and in their formative developmental stages – also shapes and guides *how* they think and *how* they can interpret a film. That body is both stimulated directly by the phenomenal qualities of spectatorship and intrinsically incorporated in the structures and modes of comprehension that arise from physiological experience. Situating the critic within the conscious (or the concomitant unconscious) mind of the viewer neglects to adequately consider the physiological body that allows, facilitates and shapes the human being and every mental faculty which they are capable of developing. A consideration of the Ego as a derivative of the mind must necessarily entail a re-consideration of the mind as an emergent property of neurophysiology and anatomy.

This critical position is, perhaps, problematic to a Western philosophical tradition that has since Descartes regarded the primitive physiological functions of the human body as secondary to the seemingly more complicated and nuanced abilities of

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[1] Joseph Dodds, 'The Monstrous Brain: A Neuropsychoanalytic Aesthetics of Horror', *PsyArt* (December 15 2009) <http://www.psyartjournal.com/article/show/dodds-the_monstrous_brain_a_neuropsychoanalyti> [accessed 29 May 2014] (part 1, para 5 of 8).
[2] Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. by W. R. Boyce Gibson (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1952), pp. 114-15.

the human mind. Phenomenology, for example, claims to be a philosophy of human experience yet it maintains a troubled relationship with the physiological world. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty claims the body to be 'the visible expression of a concrete ego' in a sentiment that places conscious experience, considered if not in isolation from then certainly in preference to physiological experience, at the forefront of his inquiry.[3] Merleau-Ponty cautions his reader from following scientific investigation into the realm of objectivity, warning that with such endeavour

> the impelling intentions of the living creature were converted into objective movements: to the will only an instantaneous fiat was allowed, the execution of the act being entirely given over to a nervous mechanism. Sense experience, thus detached from the affective and motor functions, became the mere reception of a quality, and physiologists thought they could follow, from the point of reception to the nervous centres, the projection of the external world in the living body.[4]

While it is certainly true that focusing solely upon biological mechanisms in the consideration of sensation does neglect to consider both the totality of human existence and the fact that sensing and perceiving are two separate conditions, science no longer seeks or provides such simplistic investigations. The model of physiological consideration I have constructed here argues precisely the opposite: that sensory experience is coexistent with psychosocial experience and, as such, must be considered when attempting to determine how a phenomenon may be interpreted. The body and its experiences simply cannot be ignored because they provide the very basic materials and infrastructure of comprehension. It is not the external world that projects into the living body but the body that projects itself and its understanding onto and into the world around it. Human experience is – in a simplified but fundamentally unquestionable manner – hierarchical. The organism pre-exists its ability to be conscious of its existence: I do not experience society or culture without first experiencing the conditions of my material embodiment. As a result, the existential experience of being structures both the sociocultural configurations we are capable of generating and the ways in which we are able to conceptualise all facets of

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[3] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 1962), p. 55.
[4] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 55.

our embodied existence.[5] When Descartes proclaimed *cogito ergo sum* – I think, therefore I am – he stated both a truism and an amorphism. A statement both undeniable (I *am*, after all) yet lacking in perceptual acuity (what am I?) could reasonably be met with the reply – what is *thinking* and where does it come from? It is thought that allows us to move from A to B without tripping or becoming diverted. It is thought that guides our interactions with people and things around us. It is thought – conscious and unconscious – that generates the interpretation of a film with which critics engage.[6]

Psychology and neurology have engaged with this problematic question on parallel and increasingly converging lines. Psychology takes as its starting point the formation of the Ego, the individual's subjective consciousness and the social environment into which they are introduced. Neurology takes as its starting point the human brain and body and the effect that it has upon what we do. Behavioural neuroscience marks the interstice between the disciplines – a space that is becoming increasingly less demarcated – as it considers the end result and the raw input as part of a single continuum produced by an organism engaging with its environment. Correlations and coincidences between brain function and 'mind' processes are myriad as it becomes increasingly obvious that 'there are no brain parts for disembodied cognition'.[7] Thought does not arise from an incorporeal firmament and coincidentally manifest in the minds of the thinkers. Rather, it is generated by a confluence of complex biopsychosocial interactions throughout both the body and consciousness of an individual. Behavioural neuroscience has demonstrated that altering or damaging the brain alters or damages the mind. If the mind is a function of the brain then what we describe as 'thoughts are just modes of interaction and action. They are *in* and *of* the world (rather than just being *about* the world) because they are

[5] Of course, the sociocultural structures that humans generate create a feedback loop between experience and concepts related to that experience. While this influence may appear to be formative, however, it is more accurately described as adaptive. That is, sociocultural experience *adapts* the embodied schemata that underpin the human ability to conceptualise and rationalise but it does not fundamentally change them.

[6] In the neurological, rather than psychoanalytical sense, conscious thoughts are those we are aware of whilst unconscious thoughts are those that operate below the level of awareness but whose effects are nevertheless significant.

[7] Don M. Tucker, *Mind From Body: Experience From Neural Structure* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 59.

processes of experience'.[8] The augmentation of existential philosophy that recognises both 'I am' and that my (physical) being is an important influence upon 'how and what I am' is the experientialist philosophy of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. Taking the phenomenal reduction one step further, experientialism disregards consciousness as the seat of our logical presuppositions, thus returning us to the phenomenal sensorial body as the foundations of our embodied existence.

When a viewer watches a film, the process does not occur in the mental ether disconnected from their brain, their nervous system, their body or their organic tissue. It occurs *in them*, in *all* of these locations. Chapter one, 'Re-vision', demonstrated that the eyes of the viewer are not isolated during spectatorship. The metaphorical qualities of Laura U. Marks' haptic image gain a truly embodied facet with the consideration of sensorimotor mirror neurons that fire under circumstances of stimulation (actually performing an action) and simulation (watching that action performed) as 'our self' literally does '[rush] up to the surface to interact with another surface'.[9] Our neurological bodies simulate the actions, reactions and sensations that we watch, hear, or read about as the brain acts as the body's integrating hub. As the ungloved finger strokes a trail down the captive torso in *Gut* (2012), the viewer watches but the act of touching is also simulated, the texture of skin is evoked by the deep focus, temperature is implied by the blue-tint and the pooling sweat. All of these sensations combine with the semantic connotations of the image to produce the embodied reaction of each individual viewer. This is not merely a theoretically haptic, almost anti-visual image, but an acutely sensorial experience; a somatic image offered not only to the viewer's mind but also to their body. This somatic response is often accompanied by a decrease in visual perspicacity, as in the found footage subgenre, that appeals to other somatic process within and through the eyes. Unnerving displays of imbalance have a restrictive effect upon the viewer, discouraging them from becoming comfortable with the narrative rhythm. The structure of *The Poughkeepsie Tapes* (2007) provides an extreme and effective example of the use of momentary disorientation in presenting an ambiguous and ultimately unfulfilling narrative. The alternation of the streams of footage, along with the degradation that continually

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[8] Mark Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 117.
[9] Laura U. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. xvi.

questions the robustness and authority of the image itself, offers a type of sensory manipulation in place of a classical narrative structure.

It is not, however, mere sensory play that structures the somatic image, as it is not simply the brain that structures and designates the mind. In Chapter two, 'Vestibular Manipulation', it was proposed that embodied experiences, including sensations, provide structures of understanding, 'perceptual schemata […] that our experience must fit if it is to be coherent and comprehensible'.[10] One such intricate schemata is that of 'balance'. Guided by our experience of the human body as bipedal, vertical and bilaterally symmetrical and complemented by our manipulation of objects and forces throughout our lives, we are able to comprehend a schemata that is both ineffably specific yet, it seems, almost limitlessly flexible. We speak of the balance of an argument or the balance of the visual field with such an inherent understanding that delineating what we mean can sometimes be problematic. The equal distribution of forces around a point or axis model is so entrenched in bodily experience that to find its point of origin in abstract thought seems ludicrous. Yet the concept itself is extended immeasurably from the physiological experience that gave rise to it. We are able to envisage and comprehend acts of metaphorical and physical balance that we are incapable of – such as circular balance or proportional balance between constituents of a visual field. Physiological experience underwrites the cognitive concept but does not limit it. There has been a concerted effort throughout the discussion to demonstrate the ways in which detailed consideration of human anatomy and neurophysiology can complement, rather than undermine, the intricate and insightful theory already generated by other methodological frameworks. In an incredibly simplified form, the arguments herein rest upon the philosophical assertion that an individual exists prior to a specific sociocultural context. Moreover, this pre-conscious existence provides the concrete basis of the resulting psychosocial life. *Sum, ergo cogito sum* – I am, therefore I think I am. This material existence is not viewed as a limiting factor but as an enabling one. It provides the foundations upon which the individual – consciousness, Ego, self, I – is carefully and methodically constructed through the dynamic and multifarious interactions of body, mind, environment, and culture. Organic experience is modified, augmented and in some

[10] Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 21.

cases mutated by the extraneous influences imbued by its environment (both physical and psychosocial) but this modification can only occur within a spectrum of possibility. This spectrum is unavoidably defined by physiology.

'The neural structures of the mind, the networks of the brain, exist to construct information' both interoceptively from the body and exteroceptively from the environment.[11] What occurs in the brain, and thus generates the conditions for consciousness, is the large-scale integration of biologically and socio-culturally relevant information. The confluence of this information and the fluid experience of action-response-reaction as the individual navigates the biopsychosocial landscape generate schemata, concepts that associate physiological experience with external events. These concepts are associative – applied to previous experience – and predictive, allowing the individual to envision consequences of certain actions they *may* take. The fact that these schemata conjoin historic experience with potential events suggests that there is a conceptual 'mental space in which we perform image-schematic operations' that allow the human brain-mind to transition from *what has happened* to *what may happen* in a largely unique manner.[12] These embodied schemata, systems of sensorimotor capacities that our experiences must adhere to in order to make sense, are the product of the amalgamated body-mind of the individual. Both physiological and psychological, based in reality and abstract logic and conceivable as both an axiom and a flexible metaphorical concept, they give meaning to us 'in patterns, images, qualities, feelings' and only eventually 'concepts and propositions'.[13] When Marcus Dunstan's camera rotates through two axes simultaneously in *The Collector* (2009) the effect of the motion is both *seen* by the discord between the viewer's eyes and vestibular system and *felt* by the viewer's understanding of the implications of imbalance and narrative disequilibrium. Manipulations of balance *mean* on two levels – the physiological and the psychosocial – and this reciprocal relationship allows films such as Neil Marshall's

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[11] Tucker, p. 16.
[12] Johnson, *The Body in the Mind*, p. 25. The ability to conceptualise, hypothesise scenarios and to problem solve is certainly not unique to human beings. Many mammals and birds have been shown to demonstrate conceptual and/or abstract thought in their ability to construct multiple-step processes without a long period of trial-and-error. Human consciousness is generally considered to be distinct from these other types of comprehension due to the extent to which humans can manipulate this type of thought process, and the survival benefits that have resulted from this ability.
[13] Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body*, p. 9.

The Descent (2005) to generate a sustained atmosphere of unease by teetering on the brink between the physiological experience and conceptual application of the embodied schema.

I have thus far implicitly proposed a conceptual distinction between two facets of what we think of as 'the body'. On one hand, we have the physiological organism that senses its environment and organises those sensations into schemata. On the other hand, we have the lived-body that Merleau-Ponty saw as the visible manifestation of the ego, the body driven by the intentional relationships of the subjective consciousness, or the 'mind', of the individual. In this preliminary model – the perfunctory nature of which will shortly become evident – form and content are distinguished by the application of the individual (differentially referred to as 'consciousness', 'subjectivity', 'the Ego' or 'me') to the latter formulation. Somehow distinct from material existence, the individual is imbued with ambivalence towards the physical body. It is both 'me' and 'mine'; crucial to life yet overlooked in the act of living. Seen as a tool or a vehicle more than as a mode of being, the body is often elided in favour of the rich dynamism of the lived-body. It is in this vein, for example, that Vivian Sobchack mobilises 'a philosophy of *conscious experience*' grounded in 'the phenomenon of signification' that implicitly steps over the organicity of the viewer even as it attempts to acknowledge the corporeal nature of the viewer-film interaction.[14] It seems that the *film experience* is embodied whilst the viewer remains principally 'an enworlded subject of vision'.[15] What contemporary applications of phenomenology fail to fully articulate is the intrinsic and inescapable relationship – in some ways causal, in other ways dialectical – between the condition of being 'an enworlded subject of vision' and the conditions of *being*. Merleau-Ponty himself recognised, albeit with ambivalence, that 'one does not account for the facts by superimposing a pure, contemplative consciousness on a thinglike body'.[16] The human body is not an organic exoskeleton into which the subjective consciousness of the individual is placed. The human mind, as Sigmund Freud noted nearly a century

[14] Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 27.
[15] Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye*, p. 27.
[16] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'An Unpublished Text by Maurice Merleau-Ponty: A Prospectus of his Work', trans. by Arleen B. Dallery, in *The Primacy of Perception*, ed. by James M. Edie (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), pp. 3-11 (p. 4).

ago, is not an incorporeal mental concept but is in fact a product of the convergence of all planes of human existence and experience.

I have sought to highlight the ways in which the phenomenal lived-body experience of an individual is indelibly permeated by the sensations of the physiological organism. On a simplistic level our senses are stimulated by phenomena and the congruence of the sensations contributes to the way in which we combine them into coherent perceptions. On a more sophisticated level, I have contended that pre-psychosocial physiological experience provides adaptive structures of comprehension that form the foundations of the perceptions that we are able to formulate. Thus, the separation of body and mind, form and content, which was enacted in the first two chapters was performed not in order to reaffirm or eschew a *hierarchy* between the two, but to explicate – conscientiously and purposefully – the absolutely fundamental connection between physiological and psychosocial life.

In so doing, an analogous comparison has become increasingly evident: as a viewer is a compound of their form and content (body-mind), so too is a film. As an active combination of technology and psychosocial signification a film, like a body, is capable of offering sensations and suggesting perceptions to its viewer. Also like a body, these sensations and perceptions are interwoven as the former generates and augments the latter. I do not wish, however, to pursue the body-film analogy to the extent of Vivian Sobchack when she writes that 'insofar as the consciousness of another as well as of oneself is known in its manifest form as *embodied intentionality*, then a human and a film can both be said to articulate consciousness, or, in this instance, 'mind''.[17] As I have explained, consciousness is not merely the manifestation of an individual existing in the world but is instead a highly specific and manifold property of a particular neurophysiology *as it exists and operates*. We *intend* towards the world because we are incarnated within it. While a film offers sensations and perceptions it cannot sense or perceive its own phenomenal environment. If consciousness is an emergent property of the large-scale integration of biologically and socio-culturally significant information *in an on-going dynamic process of existential experience* then a film is incapable of exhibiting consciousness.

[17] Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye*, p. 13.

I feel that stretching the body-film analogy encourages an unproductive move away from the physiological in favour of the psychosocial. Instead, we can propose that tracing the junctures between the viewer's physiological and psychosocial experience of cinema exposes the *metaphorical* nervous system of film. This exposition, rather than revealing the embodied nature of cinema, is in fact a reflection of the body of the viewer. Contemporary horror increasingly seeks to mimic the interrelated structures of bodily sensation and psychosocial perception evident in its viewer in a bid to galvanise the multimodal somatic film experience.

Contemporary horror film has been chosen as the illustrative example of this reintegration of the physiological and psychosocial viewer-consumer for two distinct but reciprocally related reasons. Firstly, in both form and content, the threads of sensation that permeate these films are closer to the skin, or the surface of the film. The filmic skin, like our own, presents to the world the mingled unity of 'sensation and perception' as an irreducible phenomenological entity.[18] As such, a holistic consideration of horror film must mirror our consideration of 'the body' and necessarily include analysis of both its form (sensation) and content (perception). Secondly, the foregrounding of the intrinsic nature of sensation marks a significant evolution of the viewing experience that reunites the viewer's physiological and psychosocial existence. As the horror genre develops, the postmodern cycle of self-referential horror, which foregrounds its own fictive nature in order to facilitate engagement with the image of bodily dismemberment (as spectacle or psychosocial symbol) is being overtaken by a subspecies that seeks to rejuvenate and reincorporate the existential organicity of the viewer. The body of the contemporary somatic horror film comes into being through the etching of sensation upon the multifarious skin of the viewer. Like a brand, it is a melding between two modes of being – sensation/perception, physiological/psychosocial, and form/content – a third 'thing' that rises from one to meet the other. The image of the body *in extremis* is forcibly

[18] Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), p. 147.

reattached to the organic body of the viewer to form a familiar, yet ineffably disturbing chimera.[19]

A film is a symbiosis of form and content, sensation and perception that mimics the dynamic complexities of the viewer. I have focused upon the manipulation of perception by embodied sensation and enacted a partial relocation of the horror film from screen to skin. But skin is not merely a biological entity; it is also a site of psychosocial signification. Oscillating between the concepts of a formal boundary and 'guarantee of the wholeness of the body', a membrane that facilitates body-world contact and a canvas of self-expression, the skin has been exposed as 'a place of minglings, a mingling of places'.[20] Humans, as social creatures, come to view the skin as the outer boundary of 'me': the visible barrier between the interior and exterior. Our skin enables us to enact expressions of ourselves: tattoos, piercings, body modifications, cosmetics. As the site of both body-world contact and self-world expression, the skin exemplifies the biopsychosocial dialectic of human existence. Resituating horror from screen to skin recognises the importance of material existence but also reiterates the formative influence of psychosocial experience.

The viewer does not exist in a sociocultural vacuum and the more nuanced and culturally informed discussion presented in Chapter three, 'From the Haptic to the Somatic', sought to integrate the sensory aspects of *The Human Centipede* films with the psychosocially influenced perceptions constructed by them. In Tom Six's franchise the marriage of body and culture is monstrously explicit. *The Human Centipede* (2009) and its sequel are effective not only because they appeal to senses that require closeness – touch, taste and smell – but also because they surgically attach those undeniable sensations to the culture that surrounds both the film and the viewer. The effigy of consumption embodied by Joseph Heiter and Martin Lomax's centipede monsters stands on the threshold between the physical and the psychosocial. On one side, the waste product of an organic body that unites the viscera in an act of sensational mutiny; on the other, the waste of consumer society

[19] A chimera is an organism that has two sets of genetically distinct cells – two organisms that retain their individuality even as they are formed into a 'new' whole. In the context of somatic viewing, the image of the body and the organic body retain their individual significations but, upon coming together, form a third 'thing' both familiar yet uncanny.
[20] Steven Connor, *The Book of Skin* (London: Reaktion, 2004), p. 27; p. 26.

that strives evermore to recreate the good-consumer, ever eager to participate in the propagation of the commodity. The physical and metaphorical are fused through the human digestive tract, through its fleshy undulations and its psychosocial connotations of animality, filth and disease. These images are no longer to be viewed *per se*, but are instead to be experienced. *The Human Centipede* is not, when compared to other films categorised as extreme horror, an explicitly violent or gore-filled film, yet it is the title that has perhaps amassed the most cultural infamy. *The Human Centipede 2* (2011), of course, is a metatextual satire of its predecessor. Donning the auspicious robes of vulgarity accredited to Heiter, Martin Lomax *becomes* the centipede. The linchpin in a dyspeptic conga of consumption, Lomax embodies the subtexts of Six's original film: unnatural, dysfunctional, disease-ridden, and physically and socially abject. A plethora of connotations gathers – retching, roiling, skin crawling, sour tastes, cloying smells – that as a milieu return the viewer to their body as they 'give birth to' themselves in the abjection of Lomax as Other.[21] Through its somatic nature, the desecration of the human body onscreen sanctifies the embodiment of its viewer, unavoidably imprisoning them within its sandwich of effluvia and disgust.

The journey through the senses began with the eyes as portals through which to access the organic viewer. It passed through the occularcentricity of conventional film criticism to access vision's most powerful augmenter: the vestibular sense. Passing through the inner ear (perhaps with allusive echoes of the Proteus submarine in Richard Fleischer's *Fantastic Voyage* (1966)), the discussion then moved to the viscera as a sensorial reflection of the body-world contact and self-world expression of the skin. The epithelial yet palpably fleshy mucosa of the centipede figuratively turns the viewer inside out and nausea prevails. The final panel of our sensorial tapestry must return to the mucosa's metonymic cousin – the skin – and to the sense that most virulently and violently elides its organic integrity: pain. The interplay between physiological and psychosocial associations, memory, sociocultural knowledge and imagination can, in many cases, bridge the technological limitations of a medium and facilitate the sensorial reception of the film. The rebirth of the organicity of the individual can be incited through careful manipulation of

[21] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 3.

psychosocial metaphors that draw upon the embodied schemata that structure them. The rejuvenation of the material viewer in representations of pain, however, must arise principally from the somatic nature of the representation itself, if only because this sensation can never be divorced from the body that feels it.

Elaine Scarry's claim that pain is unsharable has conceptual cogency and political value: it is not possible to transfer from one individual to the next an identical experience of pain. Due to the subjective nature of our existence, the fact that no two people can have precisely the same sensorial experience and that no two brains are identical in terms of localised function, the distinct perceptual experience of pain – *this* pain, *my* pain – cannot be communicated in its entirety. Pain is a sensation that draws together the internal and external environment, enmeshes the two in a continuum that renders it impossible to separate the body from experience. Pain is a neurologically global sensation. Ronald Melzack's neuromatrix theory of pain perception suggests that pain sensations are communicated around a global network of brain areas involving everything from the motor cortex to the limbic system. Pain literally engulfs the body and mind of the sufferer in an *everything-now* process that occludes all other knowledge and psychological function. How can it be possible to communicate a sensation that annihilates the sanctity of the subject and lays bare their internal fibrous being with a mere visual representation? If the sensation of pain is to be communicated in any form its presentation to the viewer must recreate its own marauding appearance in the sensorium. Represented pain simply *must* be embodied. Films such as *The Tortured* (2010) frequently fail to express the phenomenological immediacy of the experience of pain in their inelegantly enthusiastic attempts at ratifying the use of extreme violence. As a result, however, the extremity of the violence in *The Tortured* is fundamentally omitted: this is not a film about the tortured, but about the torturers, and their motivation for inflicting this pain. Again, however, there is no cohesion between their motivation (the murder of their son) and their quest for Old Testament justice against their victim (the murderer), no equivalency between the two modes of violence as the psychodynamics of the narrative unfold within the psyches of the torturers. The viewer is sequentially left 'out of the loop', as it were.

When pain is embodied its physical and metaphorical reach is amplified. The embodiment of pain described in this thesis entails the sequential and simultaneous combination of sensory stimulations. These stimulations are contained within both the form and content of the film and are projected towards the viewer in ways that at first seem abstract. Violent juxtapositions of light, darkness and sounds combine to create a textural coating of sensation that seeps into the narrative of the film, infusing it with somatic valence. It is no surprise that of the case studies selected, the films of pain – *Martyrs* (2008) and *The Bunny Game* (2010) – find a common focus upon the display and removal of the skin. The point of contact between self and world is often attacked in horror film, but in the somatic film it is almost ritually desecrated as the symbol and site of the unity of the human individual. The removal of Anna's skin in *Martyrs* opens her body in a way that does not seek to expose the inside but instead fuses it with the outside in excruciating fashion. The very boundary of Anna's existence is eradicated, as she becomes *everything-now*. This phenomenal immediacy is approximated in the film's body by the sensorial dervish that marks the dissolution of the subject symbolised by the removal of her skin.

The effects of such embodiment upon the signification of pain in contemporary horror film are disturbing. The sensation comes to have meaning in and of itself. It stands at centre-stage, the point around which the elements of the film are situated as it reaches out to the viewer. What is the purpose of pain in horror film? Pain is its own purpose: as Anna kneels, skinless, in a stupor, and the camera closes in upon her eye the narrative questions come into focus and then break apart. The camera zooms past them, through them, into them and alights upon the organic heart of the film. As the plumes of light illuminate and overtake the black screen the sensations that brought the viewer to this point are replayed. We are too close to Anna to see what she sees; we are inside looking interoceptively inwards to her overwhelming sensation. What Anna sees is irrelevant; the fact that she sees, and how she has come to see, is all that matters. The self-fulfilling prophecy of pain is that its communication need only be for itself, for the generation of an aesthetic that pushes through the viewer and dissolves their sense of being separate from the film. These films recruit the viewer, their biological functions and the very foundations of understanding as an essential cog in the generation of the filmic experience. The violence within the film is no longer distinct and bounded, no longer exists merely on

the screen, but finds expression *within* the body of the viewer. The film becomes internalised not through singular moments of sensorial disturbance but through a sustained phenomenal dynamism that threads the film through the viewer's sensorium.

The recorporealised body of the viewer is not, however, a golem (a mere material form without psychological influence). If *Martyrs* enacted the destruction of the subject through physiological means, *The Bunny Game* achieves the same through a combination of the physical and psychological. Employing similar sensorial communication techniques to embed the viewer in the unfolding of the film, *The Bunny Game* accesses both body and mind to question the sovereignty of the subject. The *everything-now* that becomes Bunny's life is reflected in the *everything-now* of the film that leaves nothing to association, guesswork or chance. Distinguished from exploitation horror such as Meir Zarchi's *I Spit on Your Grave* (1978) and its remake (dir. by Steven R. Monroe, 2010) by its unrelenting focus upon the victim, *The Bunny Game* demonstrates that sexual violence is, at heart, more violent than sexual. The image of the tortured and malnourished body reorganises the psychosocial perception of sexual violence. What is a crime of 'sexual release' in both iterations of *I Spit on Your Grave* becomes a 'violent assault with the intent to injure, humiliate and degrade the victim'.[22] The emphasis here is on the embodied experience of pain. Bunny's body, like the viewer's, becomes a vector, a tangible influence upon *how she is* and *how she thinks* during her captivity until she becomes a ghost of herself. What is the purpose? Her dissolution. A curious, disquieting equivalency emerges between the two bodies – the image onscreen and the viewer off screen – as they become the dual hosts of the film. Yet it is not a true duality; they are not two separate things (image/object) so much as twin poles of a spectrum. The image, a psychosocial construct of meaning, stands with the object that has its own organic modes of comprehension. They reach towards one another, towards the aspects which their opposite harbours and that they themselves lack. The collision that occurs between these two bodies rises like the scarred brand on Bunny's back: a ridge of tissue that is the same but different, fundamentally altered by the interaction. It is through this impact that the viewer is returned, uncomfortably and uncannily, to their senses. They

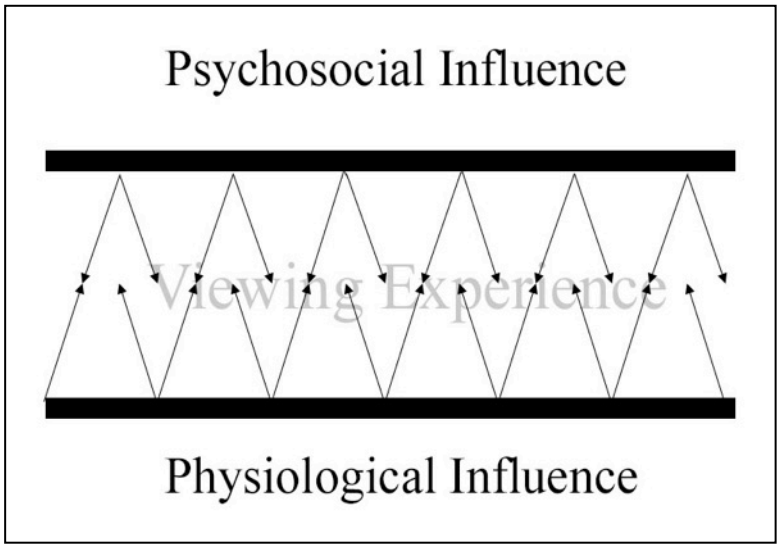
[22] Myra MacDonald, *Representing Women: Myths of Femininity in the Popular Media* (London: Edward Arnold, 1995), p. 187.

are reincarnated through the extremity of the film and the immediacy of their own sensations as they are reintroduced to their organicity through Bunny's undeniable physical suffering. This body is neither a golem nor an immaterial vehicle for the mind and has much to tell about how the viewer senses and transmutes those sensations to perceptions. Anatomy shapes concepts, metaphors and structures of understanding that in turn influence the interpretation of a film. What the somatic horror film achieves is an explicit re-incorporation of the viewer's body as a constituent element of the film experience. It combines narrative content that foregrounds bodily sensation onscreen with a cinematic form that promotes bodily sensation off screen.

The Infrastructure of Psychosocial Inquiry

Viewing a film is a complex and multi-layered process that recreates the conditions of embodied existence in so far as it provides the viewer with an opportunity to make contact and interact with the phenomenal world of the cinema. In its corporeal connection between viewer and phenomenon (film), cinema dramatizes, mimics, and expands upon the basic dynamics of embodied interaction between any sentient organism and a given environment. This interaction is comprised of a fundamentally hierarchical, but nevertheless multidirectional, set of stimulations, actions and reactions that range from the physiological recognition of light, colours, shapes and lines to the categorisation of those basic stimuli into cognitive concepts such as people, objects, places and scenarios. The hierarchy originates in the very basic conditions of film viewing: I am not referring here to the geography of the auditorium, the social conditions of spectatorship, or the psychological conditions of viewing but to the primitive relationship between a conscious organic entity and the phenomenon that it senses. The multidirectional aspect arises from the fact that human existence is never merely a matter of an organic entity interacting with one or multiple stimuli. Instead, the individual exists in a dialectical relationship with the physical, social and psychological world it is immersed in and to which it is continuously adapting. As a result, the viewing experience is comprised of two interrelated and interacting fields of influence – the physiological and psychosocial (Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1: Composition of the Viewing Experience



I have proposed that the body provides an architectural blueprint for the psychological sphere. This blueprint is then modified by the sociocultural environment, producing a hybrid unity enabled by physiology and made dynamic by psychosocial experience. As Jaak Panksepp writes, the human neocortex is 'for all intents and purposes […] a *tabula rasa*' at birth.[23] The neocortex, which houses the circuits strongly implicated to be involved in higher-order human thought processes, has a degree of plasticity inherent within it that accounts for the individuality present within the human species. We are not, nor can we be outside the iconography of science fiction horror, brains in jars. The experiences that effectively program the neocortex, which generate the conditions for the creation of consciousness, are incredibly multifarious. The brain itself is fed by an anatomically global web of sensorimotor neurons, which are in turn fed by the tissues and fibres of the human body. The position of the body in space, its orientation, balance, movement, sensory stimuli in the environment and the manipulation of objects provide the individual with crucial embodied experiences that structure the development of neural circuits and the intricate neurosignatures of experience and memory they create.

Physiological influence is implicit in the function of the human individual, embedded in the genesis of each and every conceptual manifestation of *me*. How can one present a theory of the inner workings of the human mind without first

[23] Jaak Panksepp, 'The Basic Emotional Circuits of Mammalian Brains: Do Animals have Affective Lives?', *Neuroscience and Biobehavioural Reviews*, 35 (2011), 1791-1804 (p. 1795).

acknowledging and demonstrating an understanding of the inner workings of the human brain from which the mind emerges? Sigmund Freud grasped the connection between the brain (and its sensorial sources of stimulation) and the mind in his unfinished thesis *Project for a Scientific Psychology* but scientific tools were not sufficiently advanced at that stage to allow the coherences between the two to be mapped. As this thesis has demonstrated, neuroscience is now in a better position to be able to explicate the links between brain states and psychological states. fMRI scanners can show the areas of the brain that are engaged during a specific task and experimentation has allowed several areas to be identified as being involved in very specific activities. Although this is not 'proof' that brain states create psychological states, and indeed there are no claims from neuroscience or psychology that this does constitute 'proof', it is a sustained and reproducible coincidence which suggests that 'there is a correspondence between tokens of mental states and tokens of brain states'.[24] The neurocinematic approach of Uri Hasson et al. demonstrates clearly that watching visual fiction produces brain activity. Moreover, the areas of the brain involved depend upon the genre of the fiction and 'the activity […] increased and decreased following a similar time course in all viewers'.[25] This indicates that far from being a wholly individualised process a viewer's engagement can be guided by the form and content of the particular film that they watch. It seems that films truly do strive to 'control' their viewer. The ways in which they do so, however, remain largely unexplored from a neurocinematic angle.[26] When we think or feel something in our minds, something also happens in our brains and these coincidences are relatively – in terms of sensory areas, brain formations and lobes – stable across individuals. As science moves forward, and offers increasingly voluminous evidence for the contingency between body, brain and mind, it would be remiss for theories of how human beings interact with objects in their environment to ignore the delicacies and the implications of this knowledge. Before one can interpret a film, one first must experience the film and this experience is guided by sociocultural, psychological *and*

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[24] Naomi Goldblum, *The Brain-Shaped Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 14.
[25] Uri Hasson, Ohad Landesman, Barbara Knappmeyer, Ignacio Vallines, Nava Rubin and David J. Heeger, 'Neurocinematics: The Neuroscience of Film', *Projections*, n.s.,. 2 (2008), 1-26 (p. 4).
[26] It should be stressed that this observation, replicable across participants and genres, does not argue for a 'passive' viewer wholly influenced by screen media. Rather, it suggests that firstly there *is* an effect that is generally uniform across a wide range of audience members and that secondly, this effect *could be* involved in influencing the cognitive perception of film. This area, however, needs more exploration and experimentation before anything other than tentative coincidences can be successfully drawn.

physiological factors. Films are what they are because the human animal is what it is; they are products of our culture but that culture is underpinned, and to a considerable extent defined by, the material existence of the animal. Theoretical frameworks can benefit greatly, and gain a higher degree of critical integrity, from the assimilation of the knowledge of the human sciences. The already explored facets of horror film – spectatorship mechanics, pleasure in viewing, and gender hierarchies, to name only a few – can achieve a greater degree of precision from the scientific discipline whilst guiding it to those areas that are perhaps most closely linked to the inherent biological drives and imperatives of the organic viewer. It is in this way that the frameworks may operate symbiotically to generate a hybrid method of engagement and interpretation that considers and appreciates both whilst privileging neither. The arguments contained within this thesis have traced the threads of bodily sensation within the contemporary extreme horror film and established the foundations of the incorporation of the sensorium into the somatic viewing experience. As cinema continues to resituate the viewing experience from the screen to the skin, theory must replicate this fleshy transition, must recast its body in order to question the precise nature and sociocultural significance of somatic viewing.

The Somatization of Cinema

The tentative steps taken above towards a somatic framework for film studies approach the viewing experience through the body of the corporeal viewer. This critical journey has recognised that the viewer is embodied and in their embodied state they interact with the rich psychosocial environment that contributes to the creation of the viewing experience. It is focused upon exposing the threads of bodily sensation that reside within contemporary somatic horror film with the intention of establishing a concrete grounding for the consideration of the effect of physiology upon psychosocial processes. In doing so, however, it has been necessary to exclude detailed consideration of the 'complex spatial and social architectures within which any act of film consumption occurs'.[27] The changing geography of film consumption and the medium's continued migration from the cinema auditorium to the living room, Internet and mobile device have been implicitly recognised by the selection of

[27] Andrew Dix, *Beginning Film Studies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), p. 300.

films analysed in this thesis. Of the major case studies, only *The Collector* (2009), *The Descent* (2005) and *Martyrs* (2008) received large-scale theatrical releases with many of the remaining titles being available only on DVD or through online streaming. Whilst the different spaces of consumption necessarily present different mixtures of technological capability, narrative immersion and psychosocial expectation it has been argued that there is a more immediate organic geography to the film viewing experience. Irrespective of how or where a film is viewed, it remains a sensory phenomenon that is accessed through the eyes, ears and soma of the embodied viewer and this thesis has sought to highlight the ways in which bodily sensation is incorporated, not only into the technology of cinema but into the sensorial construction of the 'visual' image. As such, a consideration of the geography of film consumption would benefit from the incorporation of the somatic principles established by this thesis: the film experience is not only mediated by the technology of the medium, the content of the film and the physical space of consumption, but also by the physiological experience enabled by the confluence of film, viewer and social context.

Due in part to the scope of the broad topic of audience-response theory and in part to the complexities of navigating the interdisciplinary and potentially contentious convergence of philosophy, psychology, cultural analysis and the human sciences presented within the thesis, the project leaves a key question pertaining to the 'social architectures' of spectatorship largely unaddressed. The notion of consumption has been a spectre at the borders of the discussion in several chapters and it similarly permeates many of the films analysed. It has been suggested that there is a tangible element of consumer desire embedded in the turn towards somatic viewing that I have argued for; that it is an economic development of an industry concerned principally with propagating itself. It is not merely the image of the body that is now being mobilised as consumer capital but the basic bodily functions of the viewer. It has been contended that this direct physiological link between the viewer and the film recorporealises the viewer in a society that systematically actions a dematerialising effect upon consumer bodies. It is, in part, a remedy as it enables a return to organic experience, to a lived experience in an environment that offers so many feeble facsimiles.

Somatic viewing encourages a switch from 'deep' interpretative viewing to 'broad' sensorial viewing, from engagement with the image as representation to engagement with the image as sensorial object. In so doing, I have suggested that the delivery of the narrative is enhanced, as both a symbol and an experience, by the somatic nature of the film. What is actually occurring in the augmentation of the viewing experience, however, is not specifically a rebuttal or refusal of the mechanisms of contemporary consumer society but a re-integration of the consumer into a modified process of consumption. The commodity is increasingly making use of the corporeal nature of the consumer such that they effectively consume themselves. It is not the film *per se* that is the product of the cinematic industry but the *experience* that unfolds between the viewer and the film. The mechanism of consumption is augmented but certainly not denied. In this respect, a consideration of the implications of the somatic viewing experience for the continued development of film as a commodity, and cinema as an industry, would begin to bridge the conceptual space between the corporeal viewer and their scripted socioeconomic subjectivity.

As part of this process of consideration it will be essential to retain an understanding and appreciation of the visceral organicity of the viewer-consumer. Regardless of how abstracted the socioeconomic environment may be, the individual that works for and within it remains at all times an organic human being. To this end, there is much value to be found in using the basis of bodily sensation mapped in this thesis to underscore further study into the distribution and control of attention in film viewership. Such an inquiry would seek to augment Jonathan Crary's *Suspensions of Perception* (1999) with a distinctly embodied element. Crary develops Guy Debord's analysis of the spectacle as 'a social relationship between people that is mediated by images' in his address of the sociocultural effects of the phenomenon.[28] Casting the manipulation of attention through perception as largely driven by sociocultural influence, he argues that it is concerned with 'the construction of conditions that individuate, immobilise, and separate subjects'.[29] Both Crary and Debord choose to focus their critical accounts upon the sociocultural influence and effects of this particular mode of spectatorship; a mode that Jonathan Beller aligns with film in his

[28] Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone, 1995), p. 12.
[29] Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), p. 74.

claim for the metastasizing 'cinematicization of the visual'.[30] Yet spectatorship and attention are not merely psychosocial phenomena but physiological ones as well. I have argued in this thesis for the re-incorporation of the viewer's body into the viewing processes, which subsequently implies the intervention of physiological influence in the 'social relationship' constructed between people and images that Crary and Debord explore. If the visual aspects of cinema have contributed to a burgeoning 'cinematicization' of visual culture more broadly, then the somatization of cinema proposed by this thesis, in turn, augments the dynamics of the visual spectacle. The current inquiry provides the physiological architecture that is inherent within the sociocultural construction of spectatorship. It has been necessary to focus upon the excavation of bodily sensation in contemporary horror cinema in order to generate a robust and comprehensive account of the ways in which physiology fortifies psychology. The subsequent phase of investigation lies in the reconciliation of this biopsychological architecture with the complex sociocultural institutions – including consumer culture, the spectacle and the attention economy – upon which it rests. Consumerism has thus haunted the arguments contained within this thesis as a psychosocial phenomenon but the discussion has endeavoured to indicate the ways in which the consumptive process is unavoidably permeated by the manner in which physiology in turn guides and structures psychological life.

In order to explore the multifarious biopsychosocial industry of consumption, it would prove insightful to combine scientific and cultural investigative techniques to cross-reference neurocinematic data from fMRI and PET scan studies with the self-evaluative reports of individual viewers. K. J. Donnelly asserts that music 'is a controlling device', and I would argue that all sensory stimulations and simulations are similarly 'controlling' in that they instigate a response from the viewer.[31] Perhaps neurological scanning techniques can help to illuminate the precise mechanisms by which these cinematic devices affect and 'control' their audiences.[32] Indeed, an

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[30] Jonathan Beller, *The Cinematic Mode of Production: Attention Economy and the Society of the Spectacle* (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2006), p. 2.
[31] K. J. Donnelly, *The Spectre of Sound: Music in Film and Television* (London: BFI, 2005), p. 10.
[32] I am referring here not to the prescriptive meaning of the term 'control' but to the regulative meaning. Sensorimotor stimulations 'control' sensorimotor brain function in that stimulation enacts a neurological response. Hasson et al. have demonstrated that film clips 'control' brain function in that they produce a comparable response in the same brain areas of each participant over time. Thus, control here is invoked in its mechanical sense and not to indicate that the film independently constructs a prescriptive *perception* or *affect* that is merely communicated to the passive viewer.

enquiry to locate the neurophysiological effects of film upon the viewer would seek to complement work in neuroscience (that explores empathy and empathetic circuitry in the brain) and psychoanalytic film criticism (that focuses upon empathetic identification with characters as a key element of narrative engagement). Instead of arguing conceptually for the generation of pleasure in viewing, for example, it may be that the limbic system's pleasurable circuits are indeed at work in some experiences of viewership.

Cinematically, horror film grabs the viewer's attention both physically (shock cut-stinger combinations, vestibular manipulation, nausea, the simulation of pain) and psychologically (the faecal fascination of *The Human Centipede* is primarily psychosocially implied), usually in concert. Its affect is culturally pervasive and often controversial. Increasingly, as horror film looks towards extremity to engage and titillate its viewers it comes to rely upon somatic viewing that, like the phenomenal immediacy of the film itself, unites the viewer's flesh and mind in an all-encompassing experience. I have tried to demonstrate the equivalence of the physiological and psychosocial in this thesis by explicating the ways in which one underpins and contributes to the structures of the other. Far from constructing a mindless biological entity this project has instead exposed the mutually embodied forms of viewer and film and has revealed both to be intricate mosaics of biopsychosocial experience.

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A Serbian Film, dir. by Srdjan Spasojevic (Revolver, 2010) [on DVD]

The Bay, dir. by Barry Levinson (Automatik, 2012) [on DVD]

The Blair Witch Project, dir. by Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez (Haxan, 1999) [on DVD]

Blue Velvet, dir. by David Lynch (De Laurentis Entertainment, 1986)

The Bunny Game, dir. by Adam Rehmeier (Njuta Films, 2010) [on DVD]

Cannibal Holocaust, dir. by Ruggero Deodato (VIPCO, 1980 [2001]) [on DVD]

The Collector, dir. by Marcus Dunstan (LD Entertainment, 2009) [on DVD]

The Descent, dir. by Neil Marshall (Celador, 2005) [on DVD]

Feed, dir. by Brett Leonard (Showbox, 2005) [on DVD]

The Fly, dir. by David Cronenberg (Twentieth Century Fox, 1986 [2005]) [on DVD]

Gut, dir. by Elias Ganster (Vanguard Cinema, 2012) [mp4 online]

Halloween, dir. by Rob Zombie (Dimension, 2007) [on DVD]

Halloween, dir. by John Carpenter (Starz, 1978 [2007]) [on Blu-Ray]

Hostel, dir. by Eli Roth (Lionsgate, 2005) [on DVD]

House of 1000 Corpses, dir. by Rob Zombie (Lionsgate, 2003) [on DVD]

The Human Centipede, dir. by Tom Six (Monster Pictures, 2009) [on DVD]

The Human Centipede 2, dir. by Tom Six (Monster Pictures, 2011) [on DVD]

The Last House on the Left, dir. by Wes Craven (Umbrella Entertainment, 1972 [2004]) [on DVD]

I Spit On Your Grave, dir. by Meir Zarchi (Screen Entertainment, 1978 [2002]) [on DVD]

I Spit On Your Grave, dir. by Steven R. Monroe (Anchor Bay, 2010) [on DVD]

Martyrs, dir. by Pascal Laugier (Kojo Pictures, 2008) [on DVD]

The Poughkeepsie Tapes, dir. by John Dowdle (MGM, 2007) [mp4 online]

Psycho, dir. by Alfred Hitchcock (Universal, 1960 [2005]) [on DVD]

Salò, or 120 Days of Sodom, dir. by Pier Paolo Passolini (BFI, 1975 [2001]) [on DVD]

Sinister, dir. by Scot Derrickson (Alliance, 2012) [on DVD]

The Tortured, dir. by Robert Lieberman (Entertainment One, 2010) [on DVD]

Vertigo, dir. by Alfred Hitchcock (Universal, 1958 [2005]) [on DVD]

Videodrome, dir. by David Cronenberg (Universal, 1983) [on DVD]

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