Letter from the editor

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Welcome to the inaugural online issue of *UBCinephile*: the Film Studies Journal of the University of British Columbia! The mandate of this publication is to showcase and promote the academic work of UBC Film Studies students, in particular the graduating Master's student. The feature articles in this issue were collected under the loose theme of violence and gender. The relationship between these two concerns reflects the research interests of the majority of graduate candidates and are contemporary cinematic preoccupations. Lindsay Steenburg explores the relationship between military violence, art cinema form and the process of remembering, while Christine Evans takes a close psychoanalytic look into sadism and onscreen serial killing. My piece focuses on the evolution of feminism and representation within the Canadian horror film canon and Brenda Wilson offers an auteurist analysis of Kathryn Bigelow, one of the few female American directors working primarily in the action film genre. Finally Jennie Carlston takes us on a cinematic journey inside the slums of urban Brazil and explores the cinematic portrayal of excessive violence.

Also included is an excellent paper by Renne Penney entitled "*Bloody Sunday*: Classically Unified Trauma?" I wish to thank everyone who made *UBCinephile* possible and sincerely hope you enjoy the contents. We welcome any feedback or comments; please feel free to drop us a line at ubc.cinephile@ubc.ca

Brock Poulin, editor

Framing War: Commemoration, War & the Art Cinema

Lindsay Steenberg

Terrence Malick's 1998 *The Thin Red Line* and Miklos Jancsó's 1968 *The Red and the White* offer images of war which defy the standard generic tropes of the combat film. Despite the fact that they cover different wars, World War Two and the Russian Civil War, and were made thirty years apart, these films have significant formal properties in common which shape the way in which they remember war and address the process of that remembering. These films fall under rubric of art cinema as described by David Bordwell in his seminal 1979 article "Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice" and further elaborated in his book, Narration in the Fiction Film. Bordwell specifies that the art cinema can be seen on a sliding scale of cinematic modes. The relevant part of the scale can be imagined with the art cinema at the centre sandwiched between modernist cinema to the left and Classical Hollywood Cinema to the right. *The Thin Red Line* relies on certain icons and conventions of genre cinema and can, therefore, be placed on the right hand side of the art cinema category, while *The Red and the White*, eschews in depth character psychology and relies on extreme narrative ambiguity, and falls somewhere on the left hand side of the art cinema. Orienting these films with respect to one another and Bordwell's art cinema allows for analysis at the sites where their formal structures overlap, intersect and diverge. A few examples of this matrix of influence is the use of deep focus, deep space, the moving camera, long shots in each films. André Bazin privileges these stylistic techniques as "representing a realistic continuum of time and space" and Bordwell further categorizes these as part of the aesthetic foundation of the art cinema. In representing war with the structuring principles of the art cinema, The Red and the White and *The Thin Red Line* disrupt previously unified narratives of good wars, just causes and noble sacrifices. Through the ambiguity and causal gaps of art cinema form, both of these films force the cinematic spectator and diegetic soldier alike to step back and consider, in long shot, how they remember war.

At this point it is necessary to offer a definition of the art cinema in order to further theorize on the effects of representing war with the aid of its schema. Bordwell defines the art cinema as a mode "possessing a definite historical existence, a set of formal conventions, and implicit viewing procedures." Although Bordwell's use of historical timeframe is practical for limiting his categorization of the art film at the time of his article's publication, it does not allow for the consideration of more contemporary films, such as *The Thin Red Line*, which use all the other principles and practices of the art cinema. This paper relies on the assumption that Bordwell's timeframe is less important than his other points, and considers *The Thin Red Line* to be appropriately considered as part of a less rigid model of the art cinema. Bordwell further describes the structuring basis of the art cinema as based on "'objective' realism, 'expressive' or subjective realism, and narrational commentary." In brief, the art cinema relies on a recognizable authorial voice (or narrational commentary), self-reflexive stylistic choices, causal gaps in the narrative, episodic structure, ambiguity in reading, and a plot which relies on complex psychology rather than goal fixated action to provide forward momentum.

The Thin Red Line and *The Red and the White* make use of the elements of the art cinema to shape an alternative vision of war, and also an alternative structure for remembering war. The process of remembering is ordered by various groups inside and outside of the film, such as the filmmakers, the soldiers and the spectators. Through the films these groups attempt to make sense of the reality of war and, more importantly, attempt to invent a method and image of commemoration in order to secure that meaning.

The Filmmakers Remember Authorial Voice

Because the art cinema relies on authorial presence through self-reflexive stylistic techniques and narrational commentary, it is useful to examine this process of remembering in the context of the lives and oeuvres of the two filmmakers in question. Hungarian born Miklós Jancsó studied law, art history and ethnography during World War Two before beginning a career in film. He started his career directing documentaries and newsreels before moving on to feature films with 1958's The Bells Have Gone to Rome. Although Jancsó's films demonstrate a deep suspicion of the exercise of state power and ideology, he remained committed throughout his life to the ideals of Marxism. Of his global perspective Jancsó has said, "Marxist thinking offers the most suitable method of analyzing the ways of the world." Jancsó made thirteen major films of which *The Red and the White* (Csillagosok, katonák) is the fourth. Jancsó's films, deeply influenced in style and scepticism by the European New Wave, deal primarily with revolutionary events in Hungarian history, from Hapsburg imperialism to Stalinist domination. Motifs which recur over the course of his work include extensive uses of long shots and long takes (Elektreia is filmed in only twelve shots); the framing of violence in long shot or off screen; the repetition of the removal of clothing and uniforms, and constant power reversals.

Jancsó's oeuvre also expresses a unique view of history and remembrance. As he notes, "[h]istory does not exist…it is always given through the eyes, the conscience of others." His films, as expressed in this statement, do not attempt to capture the historical accuracy of a specific event but rather attempt to analyze that event, and to examine the ways in which events are remembered and interpreted. Further to this, Jancsó has said, "historical events must not be accepted but understood." These motifs, thematic interests and this brief biography outline the context of the authorial input and commentary of Jancsó as filmmaker in *The Red and the White*.

Reclusive American director, Terrence Malick has made only three films in the span of thirty years, but is widely renowned, and marketed, as an auteur. Malick studied at both Harvard and Oxford and for a time taught philosophy at MIT. He was a member of the first class of the Centre for Advanced Film Studies at the well respected American Film Institute in 1969. Over the course of his three films Malick has developed a reputation for sophisticated and breathtaking cinematography and metaphysically curious protagonists. In *The Thin Red Line*, the multiplicity of narrators (in voice over) serve to express a characteristic existential preoccupation, as many of the frequently unidentifiable soldiers question the nature of man and his place in the world. "Maybe all men got one big soul, who everybody's a part of? All faces of the same man." wonders Private Witt in a voice over midway through the film. Malick self-reflexively expresses his views on violence and war through the voice overs in *The Thin Red Line*. "War doesn't ennoble men" the voice over tells us, "it turns them into dogs." *The Thin Red Line* mourns this transformation through a cinematographic juxtaposition of the beauty of nature and the violence of war.

Despite their presence as auteurs, in the style and content of their films, Malick and Jancsó did not construct these treatises on war from an isolated creative source inside themselves. They are men who remember and recreate war as part of a wider community. Maurice Halbwachs' definition of the term "collective memory" in his influential book of the same name, claims that all memories are collective in that they are influenced by the social forces surrounding and infusing the subject. Jancsó does not fashion a singular commemoration of the Russian Civil War of 1919, he pieces this memory and artistic vision together from the social tools available to him. This is not to inflict a strictly symptomatic reading on the war films of Jancsó and Malick. These films are not simple echoes of their times, as should be visible in their use of art cinema structures which work to break apart the unity of traditional narratives and question dominant ideologies. While the Halbwachs' collective memory is certainly applicable to *The Thin Red Line* and The Red and the White, the term is too large to be practical in this context. Similarly, Ionia Irwin finds that "the apparent adaptability of 'collective memory' to whatever research circumstances may lead to glossing over some key empirical questions". It is for this reason that she narrows down socially influenced memory to "communities of memory". These communities are formed around the experiences and are related to the personal relevance of the experience, rather than any direct lived relationship. Irwin's refinement of collective memory into communities offers a greater applicability to the group dynamics of the films, and their relationship to commemoration and art cinema structure.

The Thin Red Line and The Red and the White, released thirty years apart, concern wars that were fought approximately fifty years previous. Jancsó and Malick form part of a generational community of memory which commemorates the wars of their respective parents' generation. Both Malick and Jancsó are remembering their nations' wars from the other side of a generational gap. How does this generation gap influence the films and their views of war and commemoration? First and foremost, these wars represent a trauma that Irwin's describes as influential in the formation and continuation of communities of memories. This also highlights the process of narrative as imperative to commemoration. Jancsó and Malick are telling their parents' stories (or at least the stories of their parents' generation) as they were told to them, either through family stories, official state histories or the cinema itself. Jancsó and Malick are part of a generational community of child-listeners and also of filmmaker-tellers. Like Irwin, James V. Wretch draws on Halbwachs' collective memory to approach history. Wretch's"general point is that no matter how collective memory is formed and who controls it, the same basic structural tools - narrative texts - must be employed." The importance of the text is key here. As Jancsó and Malick are members of generational communities of memory on both sides of the text (as child-listeners and filmmaker-tellers). The fact that they have chosen to structure this text as art cinema changes the form of the collective memory. Art cinema composition in *The Thin Red Line* and *The Red and the White* creates fissures and gaps in the narrative of history and remove causal clarity. These breaks in the suspension of narrative disbelief and remembrance are, in part, caused by the self-reflexivity and authorial presence of the filmmakers. Malick stops the unified predictability of the combat film, and the unified process of the spectator's remembrance of World War Two, to make a comment on the human condition. "Do you imagine that your suffering will be less because you loved goodness?" asks a voice over in *The Thin Red Line*. The disruptions presented by Malick's film seem to ask the audience, "Do you imagine that the human race will suffer less because we have been remembering this as a good war?"

The Soldiers Remember The Psychology of the Art Cinema

As Malick and Jancsó form part of communities of memories as filmmakers, so too do the soldiers in their films. In long shot, at opening of *The Red and the White*, a Cossack horsemen captures a Red soldier and ask him: "What are you?". This question (asked frequently in The Red and the White) is a central concern of the art cinema which relies on complex character psychology rather than action to fuel its narrative. In both The Red and the White and *The Thin Red Line*, the question of who and what people are is the focalizing concern of the films. Both of these films utilize the psychological profile of the art cinema protagonist in unusual ways. Firstly, both films divide art cinema character traits over many characters rather than focusing on the struggle of a single soldier. The psyche of the protagonist in the art cinema is a significant part of the expressive and subjective realism that Bordwell describes. Bordwell claims that art film's primary goal is to present a complex character for the spectator's intellectual consideration. Often in the art cinema, the spectator is invited inside the head of the protagonist through

flashbacks, hallucinations or dreams. The art film protagonist does not have any distinct goals or motivations and as such slides from one sequence of the film to the next. Bordwell's art cinema protagonist frequently finds himself in great metaphysical crisis, and the art film's emphasis on this philosophic struggle "enhances the film's symbolic dimension."

In dividing these characteristics among groups of soldiers, Malick and Jancsó connect the art cinema to communities of memory, because this complex, reactive and fluctuating psychology describes groups of soldiers, rather than simply one alone. The voice over narration in *The Thin Red Line* creates an uncertainty to this psychology as it is never clear which soldier's existential questioning is heard and frequently the voice over is only tenuously related to the accompanying visuals. In one such instance a soldier torments a Japanese prisoner of war without any remorse or mercy. The sequence begins with one voice asking: "Is this darkness in you too? Have you passed through this night?" and ends with another voice asking: "What are you to me? Nothing." The effect of mixing unidentifiable voices is that the American soldiers are grouped together in a community of memory around the experience of combat to such an extent that their complex subjectivist are interwoven over the course of the film.

Malick's film also invites the spectator into the memories and fantasies of his soldiers through flashbacks, especially of those belonging to Private Bell. Bell's memories of his wife are frequently shown as he addresses her in voice over. These sequences are complicated after Bell's wife writes to him requesting a divorce. At this point we are shown Bell's wife alone at the sea shore. It is unclear whether this vision is a memory, or a parallel cut to her in the present at home in America or whether it is Bell's fantasy of her at the moment when he reads the letter. Another such instance occurs when Witt remembers the past in America. This sequence blends the present in Guadalcanal with the death scene, as the roof of his mother's house is missing and in its place is the blue pacific sky. This complication of temporal and spatial orientation is a trait of the art cinema as outlined by Bordwell. The moment of spatial juxtaposition also underscores Witt's meditations on death and his wish to meet death in Guadalcanal with the same calm as his mother did in America. The spatial and temporal uncertainties in Bell's flashbacks function to underscore his confusion and devastation at the loss of his perfect vision of his relationship with his wife.

The identities of the soldiers in Charlie Company are fragmentary, overlapping and indistinguishable in their trauma. This confusion has drawn wide criticism from mainstream film critics, who were disappointed in their expectation of generic standards. Of the multiple voice over narration one critic complained that all the soldiers "speak the same generic, prettified ersatz poetry in the same generic, prettified ersatz Southern accent" . Given the mainstream's oppositional relationship to the art cinema, it is not surprising that Malick's soldiers should be so ill received. This reinforces the similarities of the soldiers of *The Thin Red Line* to the soldiers of Jancsó's Russian Civil War, and distinguishes them from those of Steven Spielberg's World War Two.

Jancsó overlaps and fragments the psychology of his soldiers to achieve similar effects as Malick; However he does this in a different manner. Rather than inviting the spectator into the inner thoughts and dreams of his soldiers, he places them at great distance and frames them in groups. Jancsó's camera keeps his subjects at a distance, psychologically and geographically. The men fighting the war in *The Red and the White* have no names and rarely speak; many of them die without narrative pause, and few show any signs of emotional commitment to each other or their cause. What is significant about the characters in The Red and the White is their movements and reactions in groups. This authorial commentary on the power relationships of groups exhibits Jancsó's Marxist sensibilities. Jancsó also renders those individuals who are separated from their groups extremely vulnerable. One example occurs during an air raid on Red forces. The commander of the unit accuses his soldiers of cowardice and prepares to execute them. His method of selecting his victims is a completely random count off. A further example occurs when Red soldiers are singled out by their White captors to serve as target practice. Separation from the carefully composed groups is often fatal. These episodes also illustrate Jancsó's reliance on chance, or coincidence as a factor in the organization of his film. Bordwell assigns the narrative reliance on coincidence or chance as part of art cinema narration and Jancsó makes full use of this in his constant power reversals, accidental meetings and random executions. The reactive nature of his characters throws them into situations over which they have no control. Narration in *The Thin Red Line* is restricted to the subjective voices and memories of the community of soldiers, whereas the narration in *The Red and the White* is restricted to distant shots of groups of men. Yet all are unified in a community around the memory and experience of war. Despite the art cinema's favouring of character psychology as a means to uncover greater truth, "no man goes to war alone. However the conflict develops, it is always a social activity" and therefore it is appropriate that The Red and the White and The Thin Red Line rely on multiple characters to access the truth behind remembering war. Another characteristic of the groups of soldiers in both The Thin Red Line and The Red and the White is their refusal acknowledge themselves as victims. In terms of communities of memory formed around the trauma of war this is a surprising choice on the part of the filmmakers. Irwin points to a "narrative of shared suffering [as] greatly strengthening the sense of moral obligation to the communal past." In her studies on the psychology of the German public under Nazi rule, she claims that a narrative of victimization was the most widely held belief and the strongest communal tie for average men and women. To bind a community of memory under a shared sense of oppression or victimization is not only common, it is extremely powerful. Why do the soldiers of the Red and

White armies and those of Charlie Company refuse to see themselves as victims? Why do Malick and Jancsó refuse to represent them as such?

There are a several contributing factors which provide answers to these questions. The first relies on Jay Winter and Emmanuel Siva's work on remembrance and war. Winter and Siva's explain that to acknowledge oneself as victim is to deny one's status as agent. Those who are traumatized and abused have no control over what happens to them during this process and as long as they are controlled by these memories. The rapidly reversing power structures in *The Red and the White* along with Jancsó's career-long preoccupation with power relations means that his films do not reflect this kind of victim hood, for to do so would over simplify his narratives and resolve all loose ends. Jancsó's reluctance to use labels such as "victim" and "oppressor" shows the influence of European New Wave rather than Soviet filmmaking on his artistic vision. Marxists are an excellent example of a community of memory who, traditionally, bind themselves around the founding trauma of class oppression. However, Jancsó defines his soldiers under the structures of the art cinema rather than Marxist meta-narratives.

To define oneself as a victim also results in the assumption of a stable self/other border and a clear definition of identity boundaries. As previously discussed, both *The Thin Red Line* and *The Red and the White* eschew such boundaries as their soldiers are not separate entities from the communities they inhabit. Nor are they clearly designated as the polar opposites of their enemies, as both films show shocking brutality on both sides. Examples of the equally cruel behaviour of both sides includes the graphic long take of American corpses in The Thin Red Line along with the brutal treatment of Japanese prisoners of war; in The Red and the White the Red army executes a nurse for treason while the White soldiers play games with their prisoners by offering them fifteen minutes to escape a monastery whose exits have all been sealed off. To assign the label of victim to characters or to groups within the films would be to reduce the ambiguity and fragmentation so central to their form and meaning.

The Ritual of Remembering Patterns, structures, repetitions

The art cinema stresses an episodic narrative structure and a loosening of the chain of cause and effect. *The Thin Red Line* and The Red and the White use these techniques to emphasize patterns and repetitions to produce an elegiac and ritual effect. The plot of The Red and the White relies heavily on repetition. The film is loosely based on the following formula: Group A fights Group B. Group A wins. Group A introduces themselves and demands that Group B do the same. Group A commands Group B to line up. Group A commands Group B to undress (to varying degrees). Group A lines up. Group B runs. Group A shoots. Repeat substituting Group B for A. While this schematic seems overly simplistic, it is nonetheless appropriate. This outline underscores Jancsó's extensive use of pattern stresses an arbitrary and unstable power balance.

The dressing and undressing of the soldiers in The Red and the White is another example of the use of repetition. At varying times in the film, as seen in the formula above, characters are commanded to undress (themselves or a peasant woman in one instance). Not only does this pattern of undressing highlight an equalizing and vulnerable humanity under the military uniform, it serves to redefine groups of men in relation to one another as soldiers take up the cast off clothing belonging to their enemies. The women of The Red and the White are not excluded from this ritual (un)dressing. The moments of female (un)dressing vary in meaning over the course of the film. In an early instance a peasant woman is undressed by soldiers under the command of their Cossack officer who has the intention raping her. True to Jancsó's pattern of reversals, this Cossack officer is interrupted and executed before he can commit the crime. In another, more surreal, instance a White officer insists that a group of nurses be dressed in formal wear and taken into a birch forest where he instructs them to dance to the music of a military band. In a sequence close to the end of the film, a nurse expresses her desire to undress for a Red soldier. The repetition of the commands that women dress and undress has a malevolently sexual connotation, yet the expectation of assault is never realized. The later variation involving the nurse is an active decision to partake in the ritual of undressing in the interest of intimacy. Jancsó uses this repetition to signify shifting power relationships, and also to play with expectations in order to complicate the relationship between power, sexuality and war.

The formula of *The Thin Red Line* is episodic in organization. Similar moments and phrases recur at different points in the film with small, but significant variations. Over the course of the film there are repeated instances where medals are awarded to soldiers who are indifferent or hostile to the offering. Sergeant Welsh is offered the silver cross when he delivers morphine to a dying man in the line of fire. Welsh becomes angry and threatens violence as a response. Captain Gaff is offered the congressional medal of honour when his men take a Japanese bunker. This offering comes as an unsatisfactory response to his demand for water for the soldiers, and Gaff is irritated rather than honoured. A final example is the nomination of Captain Staros for the purple heart and the silver star when Tall relieves him of command. In all of these cases medals are unwelcome and sublimely insufficient at marking the tragedy of the situation. These ceremonial gestures serve only to elide injustice or mask incomprehensible trauma. These recurring moments counter the spectator's expectations of the generic conventions of the war film. The giving and receiving of medals is traditionally a ritual of deep appreciation for courageous deeds and noble sacrifices for the greater good built up around the collective memory of war. That these moments counter generic expectation is a self-reflexive authorial critique regarding the inadequacy of popular understanding of military commemoration.

Another repetition in *The Thin Red Line* is the use of the phrase: "you are like my son." This ritual naming

repeats itself in various situations throughout the course of the film, in conversation and in voice over. There are two significant situations where this phrase appears. Firstly, after the Japanese bunker has been taken Lieutenant Colonel Tall names Captain Graff as his son. He says, "You are like a son to me, John." The moment of male bonding should be reciprocated by the younger man, however this emotional offering, like the medal is rejected. It is treated as a formal military gesture that must be tolerated, much like the use of salutes. The second instance occurs when the new commanding officer, Captain Bosche, gives a pep talk at the close of the film. Bosche's speech divides up the family roles among the military hierarchy. He is the father, his sergeant is the mother and the rest of the company are his sons. As this speech becomes muted, we hear Lieutenant Colonel Tall in voice over saying, "Everything a lie, you're in a box, a moving box. They want you dead or in their lie." Tall sees the naming of sons in the military family from both sides, as a supporter and sceptic. Naming other men as your sons, unified in a family of the military is revealed through patterns of exposition, to be not only a lie but a futile gesture at human connection.

These repetitions of motifs, speech patterns and actions take on a ritual or ceremonial quality when viewed as part of the film on a whole. The communities of memory which form within and around these reiterations, are reminiscent of those commemorations which are reinforced by religious rituals and ceremonies. Baptism and burial ceremonies are influential in the elegiac structure of the both *The Red and the White* and *The Thin Red Line*. The re-combination of art cinema structure with ritual structure plays with resonance and dissonance inside the communities of the film (of soldiers, and nurses) and the communities of spectators viewing the film. Halbwachs considers collective memory to be an "agreement with those about us [which] is so complete that we vibrate in union, ignorant of the real source of the vibrations" Through these repetitions, and rituals, Jancsó and Malick experiment with these vibrations and their effects. Misrecognition, frustrated expectations, narrative gaps and ambiguous causality add to the effect of resonance/dissonance.

Images of the Judeo-Christian tradition of baptism are used in both *The Thin Red Line* and *The Red and the White*, through the cleansing potential of water. The ritual (un)dressing in The Red and the White recalls this ceremony, especially as soldiers frequently end up in or near rivers in similar white shirts. *The Thin Red Line* is less subtle in its invocation of baptism, as Witt comforts grieving soldiers by pouring water on their heads. At the moment of Witt's death there is a flash of him swimming with aboriginal children in a moment of sublime rebirth. Although both films employ the regenerative qualities of water, and by extension baptism, they also investigate the sinister side of this ritual. Water is the site of death for many of the soldiers in both films, and proves vastly inadequate at truly soothing or cleansing humanity or the world of war. By recalling the repetitive motions and motifs of baptism, and showing with its more menacing side, Malick and Jancsó break down some of the unity of the performance of religious ritual. This rupture corresponds with the guiding principles of art cinema. This also recalls the art cinema's commitment to the project began by literary modernism, which actively questioned the apparatuses of organized religion. Rituals for mourning the dead are also deeply influential in the formats and stories of both films. Halbwachs and Irwin agree that collective memories, and communities of memory are "socially articulated and socially maintained 'realit[ies] of the past'". It is through repetition and ritual that the communities of memory surrounding *The Thin Red Line* and *The Red and the White* are actively mourning and preserving the image and meaning of war. The grieving rituals, or lack thereof, in the films bind the groups of soldiers together and act as sites for debating the memory making process. In The Thin Red Line Sergeant Welsh stands over Witt's grave and asks, "Where's your light now?". In this sequence Welsh mourns a fellow soldier and questions how to remember him, and keep him active in the community of which he was once a part.

The mourning rituals over the dead in *The Red and the White* are significant in their absence. Death in The Red and the White happens with such dependable frequency, that there is never time to pause for reflection, burial or mourning. There are two notable exceptions. One occurs after the harpooning death of a Red patient. A nurse, naked from swimming, is forced to watch his violent death, and falls to her knees on the dock covering her face in grief. This spectacle of pain and vulnerability is shot in extreme long shot and kept to the far left corner of the frame. The spectator is removed from the act of violence and the raw emotional pain that follows. The second instance occurs at the close of the film, when a Hungarian Red soldier is shown in an unusual medium close up saluting his dead comrades.

The singularity of these moments is indicative of the crisis in mourning rituals in the Soviet Union a the time of the film's narrative and the rule of Stalin soon after. Many scholars have pointed to the extensive state censorship of public memory and historical records perpetrated by the Stalinist government in the U.S.S.R. One such infamous governmental policy was the ban on traditional funerary and death rituals in the favour of cremation. The two relevant elements of these abandoned rituals were the reverence bestowed on the body after death and the importance of the grave site as a gathering place for the family. Through the unique grieving scenes in Jancsó's film, and their contrast with the great numbers of un-mourned and unburied deaths, *The Red and the White* meditates on these erased rituals.

The nature of death in The Red and the White also reflects a questioning of traditional Soviet methods of war commemoration, which celebrated triumphant martyrdom and demanded the "sublimation of other griefs." The soldiers' deaths in The Red and the White are not glorious, they are anonymous, random, unnecessary and barely noticed off screen or at the edges of the frame. In accordance with the rules of the art cinema, the framing of

these violent deaths demands intellectual engagement much more than emotional involvement. The use of patterns and the invocation of religious rituals in *The Thin Red Line* and The Red and the White creates an underlying elegiac quality to the films. These are films which commemorate the loses of war by presenting horror and indiscriminate death. These films also employ art cinema tropes to fracture previously unified visions of war and, through re-combinations, render unfamiliar traditional ceremonial patterns of commemoration.

Forgetting Uses of Silence and Absence.

As both films actively commemorate wars, they also highlight the silences, absences and exclusions involved in the process of commemoration and narrativization. These silences and absences are manifested visually in both films. Violence is frequently absent from the frame in The Red and the White and large scale military engagements are not included as part of the plot of the film. Sound in *The Thin Red Line* is muted and distorted to reflect both psychological subjectivity and to emphasizes the disorienting effects of the experience of war. While the soldiers in *The Thin Red Line* openly question their circumstances in voice over, the soldiers in The Red and the White are unable to vocalize those questions and remain silent for the majority of the film's duration. Catherine Merridale identifies a pattern in the collective memory of the Soviet era of silence as a method of self preservation. She states that:

> [f]or those who suffered most directly, silence may have been preferable to repeating a story which could not publicly be acknowledged. Because there was no chance of healing recognition, the rehearsal of the experience would have brought only further suffering, material as well as psychological.

Jancsó uses this refusal to speak in his film not only to ensure his characters' resistance to standard historical narratives, but also to secure an ambiguous reading of character motivations and power balances.

Malick plays with levels of silence in his film. Moments of muted, and accentuated sound call attention to non verbal questions. During the close of the battle for the hill, Charlie Company violently secures a Japanese encampment and takes several prisoners of war. The opening of this sequence places unusual emphasis on the mechanical clicks and slides associated with the soldiers' rifles, while muting all of the screams of the Japanese soldiers and noises from the explosions of gunfire. The eerie silence demonstrates the moral questioning of the soldiers who circulate through the scene. At the close of this sequence, the sound of waves dominates the sound track and bridges into a shot of Witt happily bathing in a waterfall. The juxtaposition of the dirty battlefield and the cleansing water picks up the questions asked earlier in the scene by the voice over, "Who's doing this? Who's killing us? Robbing us of life and light, mocking us with the sight of what we might have known." The absent image of "what we might have known" and of what we already knew, but lost is a conspicuous presence in *The Thin Red Line*. This is reinforced by the punctuating low angle shots of the back lit jungle canopy and the bird noises underscoring battle sequences. It also appears in the prelapsarian aboriginal village which Hoke and Witt visit when they go AWOL. These villagers flash in front of Witt at the moment of his death. Private Bell's flashbacks of domestic bliss also share this quality of "paradise lost". The Thin Red Line's observance of the principles of the art cinema subverts an unproblematic mourning for "paradise lost". Bell's wife, as representative of an absent domestic paradise, admits that she is having an affair and asks for a divorce. Witt returns to the aboriginal village only to be awakened to the reality of disease, poverty and in-fighting. A haunting image of scavenger dogs feeding on dead soldiers competes with previous healing images of nature. For the community of soldiers who believe that they are lost, paradise is absent, even as a unified, clearly defined concept.

The Spectators Remember "Implicit Viewing Procedures"

Just as the myth of the Fall is fragmented over the course of The Thin Red Line, so is another powerful myth, that of the "Good War." In his study of the reception of The Thin Red Line, John Streamas compares Malick's film with Spielberg's Saving Private Ryan, released that same year. Spielberg's film relies heavily on genre to present a stable image of a good war. "Idealised, the Good War resists historical analysis" concludes Streamas. Malick's film refuses to use the conventions associated with commemorating a "good war" and as such invites spectatorial analysis and engagement with history. Malick's film does not completely abandon all the icons of the combat film, but experiments with the spectator's expectations. Rather than the sounds of battle, the soundtrack delivers poetry. Malick uses the graphic violence of the combat genre, yet in one case frames two dead and dismembered American soldiers in a grassy clearing and holds the shot uncomfortably long. Malick's war invites historical analysis because it fractures an idealized and glorified celebration of the Second World War. In addressing Saving Private Ryan, Streamas points to the publicity tagline that ran with the film's U.K. release: "The Film that Made the World Remember." Clearly, the good war has powerful market sway as it is used in publicity campaigns to sell the film. The tagline also privileges the relationship between memory, commerce and the good war. Collective memories of a good war, which embrace the founding trauma narrative avoided by Malick and Jancsó, are valued in an era with a comfortable distance from Vietnam.

The spectators of these films form another community of memory around the experience of war. For the duration of the film, and any intellectual questioning thereafter, the audience becomes a unique community of memory that experiences war through the cinema. Logically, there is a limit to the scope of this unique community, especially given Irwin's insistence that the experience must have personal relevance. However, seen in terms of transforming the experience of war into the story of war, the

audience becomes a necessary part of the filmmakers' journeys towards expression. They are also listeners and witnesses to the communities of memory formed within the films' diegeses. Jancsó and Malick use the techniques and practices of the art cinema mode to create ambiguity for their spectators. Within these gaps, the spectator questions the unity of the "good war" narrative, for example. In this questioning, the audience remains part of its own community of memory; one which has seen these art films and begun to question the structure of war commemoration.

On the sliding scale of the art cinema *The Thin Red Line* and *The Red and the White* occupy opposite ends of the spectrum yet they both play with spectator assumptions and expectations to complicate their narratives. Each film presents characters who have ambiguous motivations, and whose inexplicable psychologies frame the narrative. The groups of soldiers presented in each film blend with one another, creating the impression of interchangeability. Each film creates multiple communities of memory (filmmaker, soldier, spectator) which question generically structured, and unified versions of war commemoration in their interactions. Both films, despite their difference in subject matter and time period, have suffered the same criticism. Each has been called impersonal and overly cerebral; and each filmmaker has been accused of blinding the spectator with unneeded technical flights of fancy. It is these very traits which secure *The Thin Red Line* and The Thin Red Line a place within the art cinema mode, and (more significantly) it is these traits which structure the films as self-reflexive and sceptical of the processes of representation and commemoration. If it is true that "the story of war will remain collective property," then it is important to be sure that we pay attention not only to the subject matter, but to the way in which it is written. ©

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"I am not a fascist, since I do not like shit. I am not a sadist, since I do not like kitsch": Sadism, Serial Killing, and Kitsch

Christine Evans

"The attitude of commonsense… is the one to have when one discusses de Sade. I am addressing the anxious man whose first reaction is to de Sade as his daughter's potential murderer" (178-179). This writes Georges Bataille on the quintessential modern interpretation of sadism; to confuse the apparently transcendent sadist with the banal motions of the murderer is endemic to the evolution of the Sadean universe from a purely philosophical imperative to an integrated social phenomenon. While Pierre Klossowski's deconstruction of the Marquis de Sade's works identified the concept of sadism and the practice of linguistics as complementary, later studies by Roland Barthes extracted from Klossowski's analysis the theoretical polemic that the Sadean universe resists representation. Since sadism is essentially rooted in its discursive expression, in its process of *telling*, then the active and physical components of the sadistic process remain secondary to the language which dually prefigures and generates the sadistic act or crime. The consequence of such analyses which privilege Sadean discourse over any given elucidated referent, is the reader's comprehension that, "Sadean crime exists only in proportion to the quality of language invested in it, in no way because it is dreamt or even narrated, but because only language can construct it" (Barthes 1976 33). However, as a constituent of the vocabulary of popular culture, the term 'sadism' has experienced an extreme involution; far from its original conception within the works of the Marquis de Sade or the subsequent theoretical analyses imposed by Barthes and Klossowski, sadism has simply become synonymous with cruelty. It is therefore perhaps somewhat distressing to Sadean purists, as disparagingly noted by Andre Frassard, that the "dear old Marquis de Sade's dear old manias inspire two out of three filmmakers" (Sciascia 104). Exemplified by the modern prevalence of the serial killer film, the current colloquial understanding of sadism inverts the linguistic polemic by identifying the Sadean universe as both a mimetic and an aesthetic *possibility*.

A central quandary which demands address is whether or not the viewer of a serial killer film agrees with Roland Barthes' *doxa* that Sade resists representation, that "there is no possible image of Sade's universe" (1982 101). While this analysis presupposes sadism as both a philosophical imperative and as a coercive object, one must be cautious to avoid dismissing filmic attempts at representing Sade as naïve exercises in futility; for while sadism fascinates as a demonstration wherein the authority of *ecriture* obscures merely referential acts of physical atrocity, the apparently impossible task of illuminating sadism (of literally *making it visible*) nevertheless remains a captivating challenge. Without wishing to demote Barthes, we instead pose the following provocation: accepting that "Sadeans (the readers delighted with Sade's text) will never recognize Sade in… film[s, since] Sade can in no way be represented" (*Ibid*), what process of evolution (or devolution) does the Sadean figure endure when a system of representation is imposed upon him?

To adopt the stringent theoretical precept that representational failure is inevitable simply because Sade *himself* "always chooses the discourse over the referent" (Barthes 1976 37), obfuscates the complexities inherent to an image of sadism, whether questionable or authentic. Sadism may be significant only in its discourse and theory, yet remains contentious in its status as an image. The purpose here is not to negate the image simply because it is characterized as such, but to trace its development in a system of physical confrontation; ultimately, the resultant image or representation may indeed be contra-Sadean, but it is certainly imbued with a particular identity worthy of exploration. To facilitate an understanding of this inquiry, I should like to examine a succession of serial killer films as exemplary of the tendency to 'translate' sadism into popular culture; it is precisely because these films cannot be distinguished as proper Sadean objects that they are of interest, engaging instead a radically new discourse which favours interpolation over demonstration, affirmation over negation, and ultimately aestheticizes the crimes of its murderous subject such that aesthetic consciousness itself becomes parodic.

I) SADISM

SADISTS, SADISTS EVERYWHERE: THE SADIST IN SADOMASOCHISTIC CULTURE

Critically, there exists a certain overenthusiasm in diagnosing as a sadist any serial killer who does not dispose of his victims with anything less than merciful expedience. We may enumerate a host of recent serial killer films wherein the term 'sadist' is gleefully (and almost always untenably) attributed to the killer *himself,*[1] either within the diegesis of the film or in retroactive critical and academic accounts. John Doe of Se7en (1995) is a particularly ironic killer who preys upon the sinful imperfections of seven victims as a matter of spiritual polemics (he forces an obese man to eat until he explodes, compels a vain woman to decide between the mutilation of her face or suicide, and so on). Needless to say, his affinity for metaphor and torture critically mark him as a sadist. Conversely, serial killers who unconsciously eschew metaphor, opting rather for impulsively gruesome pyrotechnics – such as Kalifornia's (1993) Early Grayce or Natural Born Killers' (1994) Mickey Knox – are sadists despite their moral imbecility. Remorseless killers who are

[1] This poses a significant distinction in terms of identification, since certain methods of torture and murder involved in serial *killing* may indeed be discerned as 'sadistic.'

simply 'born evil' (Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer) (1986), and killers who suffer from momentary ethical lapses (Manhunter) (1986), are evaluated as sadists precisely because they are either remorseless or ethical. In The Silence of the Lambs (1991), Buffalo Bill imprisons his rotund victims in a neo-gothic dungeon and utilizes their flesh to questionably fashionable ends; he, too, is therefore a sadist. Apparently, and under the somewhat misguided assumption of those who evaluate serial killer films, the image of the serial killer may unilaterally identify as Sadean if only because such films address cruelty and death not as a matter of tragedy, but as a practice of transgression. What is lacking, of course, in such haphazard applications of a loaded term, is the comprehension of what sadism or the character 'sadist' legitimately signifies.

To become hypercritical over the semantic definition of sadism initially seems patronizing, as if sadism were an esoteric theorem accessible only to those willing to peruse the works of Barthes, Klossowksi, Bataille, Deleuze, Paulhan, and a succession of others who maintain that Sade-the-author's prerogative was "to think of and describe an act instead of committing it" (Klossowski 1991 13). Yet such a semantic approach generates immediate conflict – how beneficial is the classification of sadism as a coercive object when its current accessibility is firmly rooted in its status as a sensational phenomenon? Can we claim that the difficulties imposed by sadism originate in its development from a *philosophical* to a *social* imperative? Certainly, media culture is fascinated with sadism, and a flux of somewhat frivolous evidence suggests that sadism – along with its equally misunderstood erotic counterparts masochism and sadomasochism – has become culturally viable. New York Magazine, which is undoubtedly such a frivolous source but nonetheless a popular one, heralds sadomasochism as the sexual mode of the '90s (Blau 40), and the widespread vogue of BD/SM culture has elevated the interpolation of eroticism and physical pain from its former stratum as a "dirty idiosyncratic pathology" (Zizek 1999 109) to an expression of sexual liberation.[2] Yet would Sade necessarily delight in the knowledge that the term, derived from his name, now appears on garish floats in leather-pride parades?

It is significant that popular culture expounds the practice of *sadomasochism* as a sexual amalgam rather than sadism or masochism 'proper' as isolated perversions. One needs only to recall Gilles Deleuze's statement that,

> It may seem obvious that the sadist and the masochist are destined to meet… A popular joke tells of the meeting between a sadist and a masochist; the masochist says: 'Hurt me.' The sadist replies: 'No.' This is a particularly stupid joke, not only because it is unrealistic but because it foolishly claims competence to pass judgement on the world of perversions. It is unrealistic because a genuine sadist could never tolerate a masochistic victim… Neither would the masochist tolerate a truly sadistic torturer (40-41),

to realize that our 'culture of sadomasochism' is always-already flawed. The fault exists not merely in sadomasochism's incongruity, or in the imposition that, "there is a masochism specific to the sadist and equally a sadism specific to the masochist, the one never combining with the other" (*Ibid* 134), but in the realization that sadomasochistic culture is essentially *consensual*. Replacing Sadean absence and negation or the complex masochistic contract is an interpersonal sadomasochism wherein "all the drama, or play, takes place in the hidden bedroom or the mock dungeon; there is the sadist, the top; and the masochist, the bottom. It's Castle Udolpho, Montoni, and Emily, all together, without inhibition, evasion, or elaboration…" (Edmundson 130). Here, the words which should appear as most illuminating are 'play' and 'mock'; it remains interesting that particular sadistic practices, reduced to their bland component functions, have gained a certain subversive stature on the level of 'kink.' However, since these functions are merely *simulated* and both the (unauthentic) sadist and the (unauthentic) masochist escape from their mock dungeon unharmed, the question seems inevitable: where is the legitimate trauma inherent in sadism? the legitimate humiliation inherent in masochism?

Far from the "idea of that which is not, the idea of the No or of negation which is not given and cannot be given in experience [but] must necessarily be the object of a demonstration" (Deleuze 28), this purported 'sadomasochistic culture' has reduced sadism to the level of entertainment simply because, socially, it can safely occupy *no other space outside of the referent*. It therefore follows that the possible critical identification of any and every filmed serial killer as a 'sadist' does not signify critical ignorance so much as the cultural desire for self-deception. Writes Adorno:

> People want to have fun. A fully concentrated and conscious experience of art is possible only to those whose lives do not put such strain on them that in their spare time they want relief from both boredom and effort simultaneously. The whole sphere of cheap commercial entertainment reflects this dual desire. It induces relaxation because it is patterned and pre-digested (289-290).

As such, the popular permutation of sadism, masochism, and sadomasochism constitutes little more than exaggerated play-acting which allows the masses (viewers, participants) to 'have fun' with transgression in focussing

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[2] In his interesting but problematic chapter entitled "S&M Culture", Mark Edmundson provides several literal and recognizable examples of sadomasochistic popular culture: "… Madonna's pornocopia, Sex, with its photos of the material madame in potent and submissive postures, and the notorious 'Express Yourself' video that shook up Ted Koppel so. Gianni Versace dressed Cindy Crawford in heavy leather and sent her down the runway, setting a trend soon followed by Betsey Johnson and Thierry Mugler. There's the vogue for piercing and tattoos ('Did it hurt getting that?' has become young America's pick-up line). In Pulp Fiction Bruce Willis and Ving Rhames find themselves in the hands of some good old boys who're deep into hard-core S&M; it's an updated, urban reprise of Deliverance's most memorable scene. Robert Mapplethorpe has become, in the eyes of many, a consequential artist" (Nightmare on Main Street: Angels, Sadomasochism, and the Culture of the Gothic. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 132).

on metonymous arrangements; pure destruction, as posited by Sade, is evidently neither pro-social, consensual, nor relaxing, and therefore remains a matter of cultural censure. Substituting for the absence of any philosophical imperative whatsoever, involves the exploitation of countless insubstantial signifiers as phantasmatic 'stand-ins' (leather, whips, chains, and even pain itself) for that which is not socially acceptable but definitively Sadean (pure negation). We may therefore make the preliminary conclusion that sadism has achieved an impossible status as both its own cultural object, and as a referential veneration of *the object itself*; within popular 'sadomasochistic culture', whether represented on screen or practised at home, sadism retains none of its traumatic purity in annihilation, but instead appears as the obverse of its self-conception – that is, as a *phantasmatic answer*.

SADISM AND ITS VICISSITUDES

The temptation fostered by the claim that sadism has become a cultural phantasm, is to combine Barthes' Sadean dogmatism with Adorno's social cynicism to state the following: sadism resists representation because, beyond its essentially novelistic qualities, the culture which produces such representations ultimately does not understand sadism. However, it is precisely this manner of flippant reasoning which places sadism and serial killing at opposing poles without accounting for the space between them. Here, this space or gap is the concern which endeavours to chart the traditional philosopher-villain's necessary transformation into the modern serial killer; or, the gap is the site wherein the image motivates a calculable, wholly aesthetic evolution which cannot be, as Barthes would have it, dismissed as an error. Instead, we shall claim that any attempt to represent sadism creates a series of fissures which must be addressed individually before one can approach the vast divide between the Sadean universe and its opposite (which we shall tentatively identify as its image).

Firstly, the dilemma demands a deconstruction beginning with the comprehension that the phantasmatic conception of sadism as a transgressive *desire* works within what Zizek calls "the paradoxical structure of the forced choice" (1997 30). To aid in the consideration of this structure, let us assume that a film director ventures to illuminate the Sadean universe. On the one hand, the director may conceive of the Sadean representation *to the letter* and *spare the spectator nothing* – dismembered corpses, screaming victims, decaying flesh, and so on (Barthes 1982 100); alternately, sadism as an image may exist on the abstract level of the symbol, wherein metaphor and interpretation compensate (often poetically, but never successfully) for the Sadean demonstration.[3] Ultimately, both the approaches, the referent-centric (the letter) and the demonstration-centric (the symbolic), lack an essential quality of violence, whether textual or explicit. Neither method satisfies Sade's admirers. The former method (best evoked by Pier Paolo Pasolini's 1975 film Salo: The 120 Days of Sodom) is too literal and omits the textual Sadean demonstration, while the latter is disproportionately lofty and subjective, often neglecting sadistic (explicit) activity in favour of lyricism or purposeful commentary.

> We may note how sadism's representational bond corresponds with the gap between the explicit symbolic texture which guarantees the choice and the phantasmatic obscene supplement which precludes it – that is, of the gap which separates the public symbolic space in which the subject dwells from the phantasmatic kernel of his/her being (Zizek 1997 30).

By definition, Sade's erotic/quantitative combinations defy realism, since "what happens in a novel by Sade is strictly fabulous, i.e., impossible…" (Barthes 1976 36). Therefore, any image of such combinations or crimes can do little more than make sadism *believable* as a crude example of oleography – essentially, "show[ing] off (*demontrer*) how it happens not to show (*montrer*) what it resembles" (*Ibid* 1982 101). This initial consideration which divides representational sadism into images confined to the referent-centric or the demonstration-centric induces the emergence of a fissure which we shall term the fissure of *mimetic trauma*..

II) SERIAL KILLERS AND SERIAL KILLING

WHY IS THE IMAGE OF TRAUMA ALWAYS VULGAR?

If, within the popular culture of sadomasochism, sadism has indeed reverted to the level of a metonymic phantasm, then the question posed earlier situating sadistic trauma becomes rhetorical; trauma is nowhere if not in the image. Addressing trauma in terms of both sadism and any of its modern permutations, we shall accept David Selzter's hypothesis that trauma "is inseparable from the breakdown between psychic and social registers – the breakdown between inner and outer and 'subject' and 'world' – that defines the pathological public sphere" (260). To elaborate: since sadism has effectively become a cultural object (however perverted), then its inherent trauma may no longer remain confined to the demonstrative imperative. For, while in Sade's writing, the trauma is wholly discursive such that, "the acts of violence inflicted on the victims are a mere reflection of a higher form of violence to which the demonstration testifies" (Deleuze 19), sadism *beyond* Sade demands the necessary *exposure* of such trauma. Certainly, exposed or visually exploited trauma is far from Sadean, but it is nonetheless its derivation; trauma, on the level of mimesis, is the first instance in which we may note the emergence of the serial killer.

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[3] While such representations are often too abstract to warrant exploration in feature-length films, attempts at symbolic Sadean representation abound in the popular transmutation of the short film, the music-video. States critic Scott Macaulay on Floria Sigismondi's visual interpretation of Marilyn Manson's *The Beautiful People*: "It tries to be really sadistic and poetic or hard to watch [a demonstrative quality]… but ends as a mishmash of silly pretentious dead-end images best confined to bad photography" ("Thirty Frames Per Second: The Visionary Art of the Music Video." Review. Filmmaker: The Magazine of Independent Film. Spring 2000, 42 – square brackets my addition).

In Irvin Kerschner's 1978 film, Eyes of Laura Mars, fashion photographer Laura Mars is psychically linked with a serial killer, causing her to experience hallucinations wherein she literally 'sees through the killer's eyes.' It is, of course, in keeping with Hollywood convention that Laura is not privileged to share the killer's banal morning routine (this would be far too monotonous, ironically perhaps too Sadean!), yet it remains psychoanalytically significant that the murders *alone* stimulate the psychic bond. The murder sequences, filmed entirely in single-take point-of-view shots which facilitate a collapsed tripling of perspectives (killer, Laura, spectator), indicate that the film's most traumatic moments are also the instances of greatest material construction. The stylistic trope of the 'killer-cam' (most famously utilized in the opening sequence of Halloween, which was also released in 1978 and directed by John Carpenter who co-wrote the screenplay for Eyes of Laura Mars), invokes a heightened self-reference which displaces the point-of-view shot within the narrative. Trauma is therefore less the implication of murder (which is somewhat debased by the gimmick of direct address – victims deliver protests candidly to the camera, arms reach out from behind the lens and make stabbing motions), than the suggestion that it is the gaze *itself* which kills. The 'killing gaze' as a theoretical deconstruction of the point-of-view shot is hardly a novel concept, and is explored at length in Elisabeth Bronfen's essay "Killing Gazes, Killing in the Gaze: on Michael Powell's Peeping Tom"; however, what we should like to extract from the formal application of the gaze in Eyes of Laura Mars is how the *image* of mimetic trauma evolves as the representational variant of Sadean language.

Writing on the incongruency between representation and death, Michel Foucault calls for the emergence of 'another language' to postpone or at least compensate for death:

> Before the imminence of death, language rushes forth, but it also starts again, tells of itself… headed toward death, language turns back upon itself; it encounters something like a mirror; and to stop this death which would stop *it*, it possesses but a single power: that of giving birth to its own image in a play of mirrors that has no limits. From the depths of the mirror where it sets out to arrive anew at the point where it started (at death) but so as finally to escape death, another language can be heard – the image of actual language, but as a miniscule, interior, and virtual model (54).

If we translate Foucault's terms to involve a specifically Sadean discourse, is it not possible to state that serial killing occupies this space as 'the other language' – the virtual reflection of sadism, which, although miniscule, constitutes the only possible *image-realization* of sadism? And is not the inevitability of mimetic trauma the expository development which facilitates the emergence of serial killing as a new discourse? To invoke a concrete analogy: when confined to the demonstrative imperative, a Sadean libertine's reiterations of cruelty are accomplished towards an aim of pure negation, and "he finds excitement not in 'what is here,' but in 'what is not here,' the absent Object, 'the idea of evil'" (Deleuze 28). When this figure occupies a screen-space, however, his repetition is specifically staged for our gaze, and it is depicted as a massive *presence*; the repetition becomes a function of the representation, or to rephrase, the trauma must become mimetic.

> One detects here what might be described as a binding of trauma to representation or scene: in order for this return to the scene of the crime to take place, time must be converted to place, act into scene; cause and effect, act and fantasy, perception and representation must change places (Selzter 261).

In Eyes of Laura Mars, mimetic trauma is made literal; however, in equating its formal exploitation of point-of-view with the traumatic act of murder, it likewise contradicts the assumption that perception and representation are separate experiences by designating them as one and the same.

A contention with the direct mimetic approach, as in Eyes of Laura Mars, is that its resultant image of trauma is essentially non-signifying – everything that one could possibly say about the image is already there as a matter of depiction. This designates the fundamental *vulgarity* of the traumatic representation as a "scrupulous, insistent, displayed, over-polished… primitive painting" (we return again to the crudeness of the oleograph) (Barthes 1982 100). From a Lacanian perspective, the attempt to represent trauma betrays the familiar precept that trauma is "the 'hard'… reality which resists symbolization" (Zizek 1997 175); it therefore follows that mimetic trauma, when inevitably exposed as an image, is a self-identified referent. The trilateral image-identification in Eyes of Laura Mars amounts to little more than its own mimetic engagement: a killer creeps up dark stairwells and stabs out the eyes of his victims with an ice-pick. Traumatic indeed – especially considering that the spectator shares this experience as a rhetorical device – but ultimately too vulgar, too direct, and too ensconced in its own visual illustration to facilitate anything beyond referential denotation. One need only consider the banal flatness of Albert De Salvo and David Berkowitz's crime-scene photographs to discern this 'mimetic fix.' We may imagine a kind of law: trauma demands an image-counterpart which will "'assault' or 'bombard' the subject [with] the burgeoning materialities of communication, reproduction, and representation" (Seltzer 261). Nonetheless, the ensuing image is inevitably an enthusiastic exercise in a kind of vulgar superficiality (an ice-pick pierces an eyeball), since "the traumatic [image] (fires, shipwrecks, catastrophes, violent deaths) is the one about which *there is nothing to say*" (Barthes 1985 19: my italics). The Sadean trauma will embed itself in a sentence, hence the well-known *apathy* of the sadist ("I've not many scruples over a girl's death") (Sade 619). Conversely, mimetic trauma knows nothing of legitimate Sadean apathy, but rather invokes a boundless zeal for depiction; however, since such depiction is superficial and effectively "blocks signification" (Barthes 1985 19), we may identify mimetic trauma as the precursor of a primitive aestheticism. This signals yet another representational fissure – one of false aesthetic consciousness, or kitsch.

III) KITSCH

THE KITSCH ACTIVITY

Gilles Deleuze presents a mollifying alternative to Barthes' outright condemnation of Sadean representation when he posits that "sadism is *hostile* to the aesthetic attitude" (134: my italics). We shall take comfort in the knowledge that hostility does not necessarily imply impossibility and that, short of discovering a rationalization of trauma's 'mimetic fix', we may at least suggest a compensation for it. When the attempt to represent sadism as a transcendent philosophy of negation ascends to the sublimated level of 'the unrepresentable', it acquires an ideologically aesthetic status not unlike the Holocaust. I do not intend to suggest that James Landis' grossly misinformed 1963 film The Sadist is at all comparable to genocide, but rather I seek to align the essentially 'lacking' violence of referent or demonstration-centric representation with the failure of 'tragic' depictions. Since, within the context of both the Holocaust film and the filmed Sadean universe, one encounters difficulties imposed by a representational 'hostility', then the vulgarity of the mimetic fix becomes a matter of logistics; in both instances, the incomprehensible simply resists illumination. Here we may modify this polemic and state that the Sadean universe (like the Holocaust), although "elevat[ed] into the properly sublime Evil, the untouchable Exception beyond the reach of 'normal'… discourse" (Zizek 2001 67), resists only necessarily *earnest* depictions. At a certain level of absolute sublimation, any given discourse, event, or practice may only be represented by its obverse – that is, by its "unexpected reversal into comedy" (*Ibid* 68). What we are essentially suggesting is that the onscreen Sadean universe will visually sustain itself by means of a *lie*, as a parody of aesthetic consciousness.

Given that the vulgarity of mimetic trauma signifies the Sadean necessity for an aesthetic counterpart, the identification of serial killing as a *kitsch activity* arises not because serial killing and kitsch are analagously debased facsimiles of sublime models (sadism and art, respectively), but because both transmutations are imbued with *awareness*. Generally, in its status as a comedic representation, the kitsch aesthetic is imbued with the power to lie without necessarily offending its audience. As Zizek states,

> If no direct realistic staging can be adequate to the horror of [the unspeakable Evil, the untouchable Exception], then the only way out of the predicament is to turn to comedy which, at least, accepts its failure to express the horror… in advance (*Ibid*).

Kitsch, aside from its generic definition as 'art which is simply in bad taste', is a concept which "clearly centres around such questions as imitation, forgery, counterfeit, and what we may call the aesthetics of deception or self-deception" (Calinescu 229). Consequently, it would not be surprising that a 'sadomasochistic culture' intent on consuming sadism as a phantasmatic answer, should conceive of serial killing as a kitsch activity.

In equating serial killing with kitsch, we postulate that sadism may only achieve the representational status so condemned by Barthes through an engagement with comedy. The conjecture is not that the discourse of serial killing assumes a false identity and masquerades as sadism, but that the emergence of the serial killer is inevitable, that the comedic kitsch solution for Sadean representation is the *only* solution. The available alternatives to kitsch are the image-as-letter (which lacks a demonstration, as in Salo: The 120 Days of Sodom), and the image-as-symbol (which neglects the referent and results in pretension); neither the wholly demonstrative nor the wholly referential impetus is aware of the necessary violence negated in identifying as a one-sided representation. Kitsch, as a component of the serial killing discourse which replaces the demonstrative imperative with a frantically catalogued "iconography of death" (Russell 181), is entirely parodic and therefore fully aware of its vulgar aesthetic operations.

INTERPASSIVITY, KITSCH, AND KILLING

The collective understanding of kitsch as an artistic expression vacillating between postmodern consciousness and that which is simply visually appalling, is fairly convoluted. Some conceive of kitsch as a practice of collecting, others reason that kitsch applies to an "aesthetically inadequate" subject or situation (Calinescu 236), and, to most, kitsch designates anything which is 'in bad taste.' This analysis interprets kitsch as the aesthetic modifier which permits the emergence of a serial killing discourse from its stubborn Sadean counterpart; however, I should like to examine all three popular definitions of kitsch as a function of the serial killer film.

The principle of quantity is linked with Adorno's deconstruction of kitsch as a "parody of catharsis" (1984 355), wherein the subject is compelled to endlessly accumulate objects as if "to escape from the abstract sameness of things by a kind of self-made and futile *promesse du bonheur*" (*Ibid* 1941 401). It is essential to emphasize that the compulsion to collect is designated as *parodic* catharsis, since catharsis implies a release or purgation (of tension, anxiety, and so forth). Kitsch, as a symptomatic activity of hoarding objects, is parodic precisely for this reason. The very antithesis of catharsis is to engage in behaviour wherein accumulation *alone* – rather than any particular accumulated object – appropriates a fetishistic significance, since it invokes a perpetual repetition of the same motion without the assurance of a 'final release.' Indeed, catharsis is duplicitous; it validates the obsessive collection of items towards a certain end (an abundant library, for example), yet simultaneously summons a traumatic termination of the pleasure in collecting *itself*. In reference to Zizek's essay, "Is it Possible to Traverse the Fantasy in Cyberspace?", we may clearly align catharsis with *jouissance*, and the subject fixated on metonymic arrangements with the obsessional neurotic, noting that,

> the key problem of the obsessional neurotic is how to postpone the encounter with *jouissance* (and thus maintain the belief in its

possibility). If, instead of viewing films, I just endlessly record them on video, this postponing maintains the belief that, if or when I finally do it, this will really be 'it' (1999 108).

The quantitative understanding of kitsch is therefore an example of what Zizek calls interpassivity, the "delegat[ion] of our innermost feelings (ultimately, our *jouissance*) to another" (*Ibid*); the kitsch collector delegates or projects his desire onto the belief that 'completion' is imminent, and thereby continues to obsessively accumulate such that the belief itself is sustained.

One may clearly predict the placement of the serial killer into this system of obsessional neurosis, since, as criminal psychologist Helen Hudson informs us in Copycat (1995), "The [serial] murder is like a ritual – the method itself is part of the pleasure" (Amiel). Both the serial killer in Copycat (Peter Foley), and Buffalo Bill in The Silence of the Lambs, conceive of each isolated murderous act as a progression towards a definite - invariably exultant – end. (Peter aspires to be remembered as 'the world's most famous serial killer', and Buffalo Bill assumes that donning the completed 'flesh-dress' will facilitate his transformation into a desirable woman). However, since cathartic *jouissance* and finitude are inevitably synchronized, only the serial killer's obsessional economy of "postponing the final event… of limiting [him]self to merely laying the ground for… the 'magic moment'" (Zizek 1999 105), can prolong his fantasy (of fame, femininity, etc).

Beyond the physical act of killing, we may note how excessively exaggerated interpassivity and its convolutions degenerate into *literal* kitsch. In such instances, obsessional neurosis is amplified until the act of accumulating objects - with no purpose beyond their accumulation – results in base, degrading humour. Such flagrantly interpassive or neurotic behaviour confirms why serial killer Ed Gein's living room,[4] with its perversion of domestic objects, is not merely absurd but morbidly comic. Essentially, the ideology is identical to the obsessional economy of doddery old women who glut their sitting rooms with hundreds of superfluous, repulsive objects. When director Tobe Hooper recreated Ed Gein's macabre living room in The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (1974), the dual hilarity and horror induced by an image of Leatherface 'coming home from work' ('work', of course, involves gutting teenaged girls with meat-hooks) and sitting in an armchair upholstered with human flesh, is a function of *exaggerated* kitsch. Exaggeration, as posited by Henri Bergson, "is always comic when prolonged, and especially when systematic" (21). The living room in The Texas Chainsaw Massacre therefore presents a change in degree, but not necessarily in kind, from the spectator's conception of a 'reasonable' obsessional neurotic's living room; Ed Gein and Leatherface's domestic objects merely constitute bodily variations on "the horrendous old 'curiosities'… which many people enjoy as poetic relics from the better world of our grandfathers" (Calinescu 236-237).

"ANYONE CAN STRANGLE SOMEONE IN A BATHTUB, RIGHT?": SIMULACRA, BODY AESTHETIC, AND KITSCH

The aesthetic coupling of kitsch and murder in serial killer films such as David Fincher's Se7en or The Silence of the Lambs presents a temporary support for the base vulgarity of non-signifying mimetic trauma. We must concede that, no matter how we classify the contexts of its manipulation, kitsch "always implies the notion of aesthetic inadequacy" (*Ibid*). However, it is the exploitation of such inadequacy to conscious objectives which permits kitsch to function as a lie; the lie that it 'tells', of course, is that the serial killer's neurotic histrionics constitute an adequate compensation for the sadist's transcendental negation. The spectator ultimately witnesses murder as a *simulacra* which normalizes the dislocation and extravagance of the extrinsic trauma of death – as such, "attention shifts… from the horror and the pain… to voluptuous anguish and ravishing images, images one would like to see going on forever" (Friedlander 21). This is particularly exemplified by the opening sequence of Mathieu Kassovitz's The Crimson Rivers (2000), wherein a series of dissolves reveal what initially appears as a beautifully-lit landscape to be the decaying flesh of a corpse. If such a shot-series of extreme-close-ups purports to document the gradual deterioration of the phantasmatic frame (abstract curves and lines) to disclose the 'legitimate' identity of the image as a traumatic reality (a maggot-ridden carcass), then the trauma of death and decay is both ubiquitous and easily fabricated. Essentially, death needs only to aesthetically venerate its gruesome effects to achieve a "spurious beauty" (Calinescu 229), such that death itself is bereft of context and subordinated to its infinitely reproduceable *effects*.

Other such examples of death's subjection to aesthetic effect may be noted in The Silence of the Lambs. As previously mentioned, most examples of kitsch in Demme's film are relegated to characterization - a glutted conglomerate of typage. This is addressed by Martin Rubin in his essay, "The Grayness of Darkness: The Honeymoon Killers and its Impact on Psychokiller Cinema":

> Lecter and Gumb [Buffalo Bill] are loaded with gimmicks, gothicisms, and colourful psychological quirks. Gumb is not only a cross dresser but
> also a dungeon master, skinner, seamster, rhymester, breeder of exotic Asian moths, and headline-grabbing serial killer with a *modus operandi* almost as cluttered as the décor of his hillbilly-gothic domicile.[5] Lecter is a Nietzschean anthropophagus,
> psychiatrist, and psychopath, as well as a talented amateur

[4] "The funny-looking bowl was a top of a human skull. The lampshades and wastebasket were made from human skin… an armchair made of human skin, female genetalia kept preserved in a shoebox, a belt made of nipples, a human head, four noses and a heart… Finally, a suit made entirely of human skin" (Rachael Bell. "Eddie Gein." Crime Library: Criminal Minds and Methods: pars 6-7. http://www.crimelibrary.com/serial_killers/notorious/gein/bill_1.html).

[5] To this extensive list, we may add that Gumb is also a Nazi, as evinced by (of all things) his swastika-patterned *bedsheets*.

painter, virtual telepathist, Mabuse-like manipulator, and Houdini-class escape artist (58).

Although The Silence of the Lambs exercises a certain ironic visual restraint (i.e., barring the spectator from seeing a photograph of a mutilated face invokes the Zizekian concept of trauma confined entirely to the phantasmatic frame), Lecter's climactic murderous rampage constitutes a veritable orgasm of aesthetic kitsch excess. "Anyone can strangle someone in a bathtub, right?", observes Helen Hudson in Copycat, and Lecter is certainly not immune from visually hyperbolizing his status as a legendary psychopath. Lecter not only beats a policeman to death with a baton (in a single long-take from the policeman's point-of-view), but Lecter also removes the policeman's face, disembowels him, and suspends him from the ceiling with an American flag. Similarly, Copycat expounds the postmodern conception of universalized simulacra in asserting that even and *especially* ritualized murder functions as a parody of aesthetic consciousness. If Peter Foley's "posed… deliberately staged" (Amiel) killings identify as the simulated and ultimately *purposeless* doubles of historical serial murders, then Copycat as a filmic text is the ultimate kitsch object – a fictional stage for a serial killer's reenactments of past murders. Assuredly, such multiple involutions displace the context of "real death in its everyday horror and tragic banality" in favour of "a ritualized, stylized, and aestheticized death, a death that wills itself the carrier of horror, decrepitude, and monstrosity, but which ultimately and definitely appears as a poisonous apotheosis" (Friedlander 43). Although we will investigate apotheosis as a *social* utility momentarily, I should like to briefly explore the inherent and ironic *virtue* of aestheticization.

Recalling that "a comic character is generally comic in proportion to his ignorance of himself" (Bergson 6), then it is the serial killer's *unconscious* engagement with the parodic aesthetic *consciousness* of kitsch which provokes the "uneasy" humour (Friedlander 21) distinctive to serial killing discourse. The sadist, by all accounts, is neither a murderer nor a collector yet the serial killer is both; it is simply a matter of 'bad reading' since,

> The murderer believes he is destroying; he thinks that he is absorbing. This is sometimes the starting point of his remorse. Let us bring him complete tranquility on that score; and if the system which I have just developed is not yet within his grasp, let us prove to him by facts visible to his eye that he has not even the honour of destroying, that the annihilation of which he boasts when he is healthy and which causes him to tremble when he is ill, is thoroughly null, and that it is impossible to achieve any success in his enterprise (Sade quoted in Klossowski 1966 78).

In Se7en, serial killer John Doe imagines himself to be a "Christ-like antichrist" whose project is to "punish ritually and gruesomely a given practitioner of one of the seven deadly Christian sins" (Simpson 134). However, Doe's reliance on heavy-handed religious symbolism renders him most vulnerable to aesthetic hyperbole (surrendering at the precinct, he spreads his bloodied palms outward in a gesture of Christ-like supplication; the garish neon cross which hangs above his bed might have been purchased from Baz Luhrmann's garage sale).

In Se7en, focalization is confined entirely to the investigation conducted by detectives Somerset and Mills, yet such restricted narration facilitates the representation of John Doe as a virtuous or prophetic figure. Since the film's narrative structure prevents any identification with John Doe (Se7en is the only film discussed in this analysis which refrains from depicting the killer actively engaged in a murderous act), but rather focuses on the forensic activity of *discovering bodies*, the film never departs from kitsch. 'The crime' is always synonymous with *what is seen*, since both the spectator and detectives Somerset and Mills (as spectatorial surrogates) may only experience John Doe's crimes as a matter of aesthetics (the arrangement of the bodies, their lyrical implications, the clues Doe embeds into his elaborately constructed *mise-en-scene*, and so on). Despite Philip L. Simpson's deification of Se7en as a film which "definitively restores a prophetic, revelatory, and reformist voice to the 1990s cinema of serial murder" (140), the narrative is involved less with restoration or reform and more with its own exploitation of post-mortem aesthetics. The bruised ankles of the obese man chained to his chair, the enormous portrait hung strategically over the vain woman's bed, the tracking shot which follows a SWAT team as they navigate a symbolic 'forest' of tree-shaped air-fresheners. Even Doe's Biblical killings equate to mere soundbytes or 'sloganeering' when compared to valid spiritual apocalypticism. The film's foundation lies in John Doe's imaginative arrangement of each tableau; Se7en thereby exploits Doe's *virtue* not only as a delusional Angel of Death (he believes that he is socially and spiritually progressive), but his moral excellence as an artist who delights in cheap irony.

"THE 'I' THAT WOULD OPPOSE SOCIETY ALREADY *IS* SOCIETY RIGHT TO ITS CORE"[6]

We have already addressed the reality that popular sadomasochistic culture retains only the least socially damaging aspects of sadism, for to do otherwise would only induce blood-drenched anarchy. I would, therefore, like to pause in my analysis of demonstrations and representations to elucidate an obvious argument as to why the serial killer discourse emerges as the modern Sadean variation. The sadist, consistent with his atheistic desire to renounce all subjects and objects, including his own self-condition, can present no feasible argument to validate his crimes. Indeed, to do so would be contra-Sadean, since Sade's narratives are "unsympathetic to people moved by need and by fear" (Bataille 178). Sade's aim was *always* anti-social, and this indicates the practical necessity for sadism's evolution into a new discourse; simply stated, sadism (or its closest approximation), must be rendered culturally and socially accessible, since "Sade's ideas are… incompatible with the ideas of

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[6] Mark Edmundson. "S&M Culture." Nightmare on Main Street: Angels, Sadomasochism, and the Culture of Gothic. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997. 127.

reasonable beings" (*Ibid* 179). We may partially attribute such incompatibility to the hermetic nature of the Sadean libertine, who may only thrive in a closed, isolated space such as the Chateau Silling in The 120 Days of Sodom; within these confines, the society becomes one composed entirely of the oppressors and the oppressed.

Since "those who know themselves to be accomplices in aberration need no argument to understand one another" (Klossowski 1991 27), the intrusion of judgemental third parties from 'reasonable' society is prohibited; we may take this statement and interpret it differently, claiming that sadism in no way endorses exhibitionism. A legitimate sadist does not require the presence of a spectator to excite his fantasy. Given that sadism is (at the very least) "hostile to the aesthetic attitude" (Deleuze 134), then the presence of a judgemental Other would have negative implications; since the provocation of any reaction in the Other (even outrage or disgust) would incur a certain justification of the sadist's crimes (accepting the axiom that what is seen must be justified).

As the culturally 'neutralized' incarnation of the sadist, the serial killer always invokes the argument or justification which the sadist negates. Since the serial killer is the embodiment of a cultural perception of sadism, it is therefore essential that his motives reflect some compatibility with the 'reasonable' norms of the culture poised to consume him. This may explain why conscious attempts to humanize the serial killer often appear contrived to the point of parody - while the murderous act is staged for our pleasure, the rational argument *for* murder is staged for our comfort. The isolated serial killer is an anti-social individual, yet his murders result in a social affirmation which ultimately redeem him. G.K. Chesterton accurately observes that,

> we have probed, as if it were some monstrous new disease, what is, in fact, nothing but the foolish and valiant heart of man. Ordinary men will always be sentimentalists: for a sentimentalist is simply a man who has feelings and does not trouble to invent a new way of expressing them. These common and current [works] have nothing essentially evil about them. They express the sanguine and heroic truisms on which civilization is built; for it is clear that unless civilization is built on truisms, it is not built at all. Clearly, there could be no safety for a society in which the remark by the Chief Justice that murder was wrong was regarded as an original and dazzling epigram (par. 8).

John Doe is disillusioned with society's moral decay and "willing to be the vanguard of the fundamentalist backlash" (Simpson 135); The Cell's (2000) otherwise monstrous adult killer Carl Stargher conjures a psychic representation of himself as a young boy to illustrate the origins of his psychosis (child abuse); the killer in Eyes of Laura Mars delivers a patronizing monologue explaining his ritual ice-pick murders as the necessary moral solution to Laura Mars' sensationally violent photography. One may enumerate a host of such quasi-logical attempts to absolve or humanize the serial killer, since "even the most rebellious of us contain the principle of oppression – the principle that we most detest – as a major element in our self-identities" (Edmundson 127). It therefore stands to reason that the serial killer, unlike the legitimate sadist, identifies as an exhibitionist as a matter of social responsibility.

One somehow doubts that Roland Barthes' declaration, "Sade can in no way be represented" (1982 101), was intended as a provocation, yet it nonetheless negates the complexities of image-production regardless of their authenticity. The essential quandary with Barthes' analysis is that it presupposes the failure of Sadean representation as *inevitable* rather than accounting for the vicissitudes inherent in such 'failure'; sadism may be significant only in its theoretical discourse, yet remains controversial as an image. The purpose of this analysis has been to examine the image within its social context and monitor its discursive evolution from sadism to serial killing. Representational sadism is composed of a series of binary oppositions which far exceed the superficial divide between demonstration and referent, yet the Sadean purist must be prepared to navigate the liminal space between death and the parody of aesthetic consciousness as the space of the serial killer.

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Reading Against the Gore: Subversive Impulses in the Canadian Horror Film

Brock Poulin

"No one ever thinks chicks do shit like this. Trust me, a girl can only be a slut, bitch, tease or the virgin next door. We'll just coast on how the world works." -Ginger, *Ginger Snaps*

To a large extent, contemporary genre films owe their existence to the films that have come before them. Without a canon of previously established genre conventions, mores and audience expectations, there would be no genre with which to continue the legacy. In the horror film, genre rules are quite firmly set. It is not difficult to link contemporary horror cinema to generic examples from the last one hundred years. It is expected that a vampire film will feature blood, bites and gothic costuming, and that most of the rules of the vampire film remain firmly set. And, the slasher film almost always includes the nubile female virgin who will, if she remains virginal, survive the carnage as well as the killer, who is undoubtedly a psychologically monstrous human deviant (whom the film often inexplicably anoints with superhuman strength and agility). Jonathan Lake Crane, who has written extensively on the horror film genre, states, "Over time, generation upon generation of retroactive films come to constitute a massive family tree in which every descendent bears a strong resemblance to its predecessors." In this vein, by definition, the horror film is consistent in its reluctance to change, and, it could be argued, is stale in terms of its themes. Perhaps that is why horror films are consistently among the worst reviewed and most easily dismissed by film critics and academics. Why study the same old game?

This reluctance to embrace the horror genre is also consistently linked to the exploitative, repetitive and silly storylines (one of the most popular horror movie franchises is the *A Nightmare on Elm Street* series, in which monstrously disfigured dead burn victim Freddy Kreuger hunts and kills people in their dreams!), as well as the abundance of disturbing and arguably disgusting imagery. Where is the value in seeing a half-naked woman being chased through the woods and then stabbed to death? Especially when this scene can be found in dozens of similarly themed horror movies? However, what is being missed when these films are ignored critically is that, often times, this carnage is the point. People are attracted to horror movies not for characters, actors or directors, but to see the creative ways stock characters can be stabbed, sliced, impaled. And, when horror films are made intelligently and with psychological and thematic depth, these themes can be subverted and speak truths about the world in which we live. The aforementioned exploitation is also important. Horror films are known for being sexy and scary, for showing deviant behaviour both sexually and in terms of violent acts. So, then, how are these excessive texts important?

In his book Dark Romance: Sexuality and the Horror Film, David J. Hogan expands upon this idea for almost three hundred pages. He reads horror movies as explicit points of study for the intersection between sex, violence and death. "Besides being the most purely entertaining of all movie genres, the horror film warrants serious study because it is also the most vivid and unrestrained. If motion pictures in general reflect our dreams and fears, then the horror film liberates the dreams and beats back those fears." Although it is easy to disagree with Hogan's claims about the entertainment level of horror films in comparison to other films (that is a matter of taste, and even the most ardent horror fan is aware of the limited audience appeal of some of the extreme visuals these films make their mandate), it is difficult to argue with his observations of horror's link to sex, fear, and the meeting point between the two. "Because the genre is predicated upon an awareness of the inevitability of death, its exploration of sexuality has been unavoidable. Sexual behavior and its ultimate purpose, children, are quite clearly the antithesis of death. If one is to examine death, then, one must examine sex." To Hogan, the horror film becomes an invaluable looking glass in which to see important sexual and cultural representations of society reflected in.

On the most basic levels, it has been established that horror films are saturated in repetitive storytelling loops. And, it has also been shown that within the horror genre we have an important showcase to examine important psychosexual issues. What we have here seems to be somewhat of a lost opportunity. Horror, as a genre, is concerned with exploring fascinating psychological, physiological and pathological avenues of human sexuality, while the actual products of this genre (re: the filmic texts themselves) are repetitive and often exploitative while rarely taking advantage of the seemingly endless psycho-sexual reservoir of possible themes.

However, when Canadian horror films are examined, the opportunity appears to be somewhat recovered. David Cronenberg's *Rabid* (1976) and *The Brood* (1979) and director John Fawcett and writer Karen Walton's *Ginger Snaps* (2000), all Canadian horror films, are subversive examples of the horror film and all three films take extensive advantage of Hogan's reading of horror films as complex and meaningful cultural texts. And, when examined in tandem, these three films offer an interesting analysis in terms of the horror clichés, female as monster and female sexuality as dangerous. What follows is a brief analysis of the subversive nature of these two Cronenberg horror texts and a close analysis of *Ginger Snaps*. Cronenberg's oeuvre has been studied and deconstructed at length by other scholars, so the analysis of those two films will act as a jumping-off point and will establish significant recurring themes for the closer look at Ginger Snaps (which has been almost completely ignored in terms of critical and theoretical analysis thus far).

David Cronenberg is one of Canada's most accomplished auteurs, even when the genre he is arguably best known for, horror, is brushed aside. It could also be argued that it is psychological and technological

transformation stories that Cronenberg now tells. Films like *Spider* (2002), *Crash* (1996) and *eXistenz* (1999), while featuring aspects of the grotesque, clearly eschew the strict characteristics of the horror film and would most likely be described as art cinema. International critical acclaim and attention at prestigious film festivals like Cannes reinforce this. However, Cronenberg's earlier films, like *Rabid* and *The Brood* (as well as *Shivers* (1975) and *The Dead Zone* (1983), among certain aspects of others) can be classified as belonging to the horror genre. Both feature a monster, bloody deaths, and both are quite harrowing viewing experiences. Dark cinematography, suspenseful editing and typical horror movie acting styles strengthen this interpretation. However, these films are concerned with a lot more than typical thrills and chills associated with the horror film. When examined more closely, their psychological depth, and (as will be argued, problematic) obsession with the dangerous effects of female sexuality are revealed.

Rabid begins with a bang. Rose, a beautiful young woman, is traveling with her boyfriend through the country on his motorcycle. A sudden car crash and subsequent motorcycle explosion render Rose unconscious and in desperate need of medical attention. Because it is doubtful that Rose will make it to a larger, urban, hospital in time, she is taken to the Keloid Clinic for Plastic Surgery, where Dr. Keloid performs emergency surgery on her. Keloid, who has been experimenting with "morphogenetically neutral" tissue, repairs the comatose Rose, and she is placed in a hospital bed to recover. When Rose awakens, there is a horrific byproduct of the radical surgery - the only thing that will sustain her is other people's blood. Through the healing process, Rose has developed a new organ for the extraction of this blood, complete with new consequences that arise from her unwanted self-transfusions. William Beard, author of The Artist as Monster: The Cinema of David Cronenberg, describes the organ as "a kind of organic spike that 'lives' behind a puckered fleshy orifice in her armpit, and which she can drive into her victims while embracing them. If effect, she is a vampire. Her food sources then develop their own catastrophic side-effect: terminal rabies, which they spread to others by biting them in uncontrollable raging fits." These rabid victims develop "rheumy eyes and puffy yellowish complexion, green froth foaming from the mouth, and a gleeful and vicious appetite for flesh," and must be shot in the head to be killed. Eventually, the rabies spreads throughout Montreal and Rose, realizing the carnage she is, although somewhat indirectly, responsible for, arranges for her own death. The film concludes with sanitation workers piling bodies (including Rose's) into the back of a truck.

Although the film utilizes many of the established conventions of the horror film, including the zombie, the vampire and much gore, Cronenberg uses these to make larger cultural statements. Most obviously, especially when examined alongside some of Cronenberg's other films, *Rabid* is a cautionary tale denouncing untested and risky medical experimentation. Rose's condition is directly related to the experimental cosmetic surgery she undergoes at the hand of Dr. Keloid, and even he fears what might happen to her upon awakening. The result is a citywide plague and thousands dead. No cosmetic surgery can possibly be worth that. The film also plays with ideas of predatory male desire and the medical danger of unfettered sexual experimentation and promiscuity. However, exactly what Cronenberg is getting at is complicated by his representation of the female monster.

Another subversive element unique to *Rabid* can be located within the film's casting. Rose is played by Marilyn Chambers, one of the first large-scale celebrities associated with the pornographic film industry of the 1970s. As William Beard has observed, "Diegetically, Rose is basically innocent and suffering and humanly sympathetic. Supra-diegetically, Marilyn Chambers is creating havoc with her horrifically powerful sexuality." Marilyn Chambers, then, is known for her sexual prowess and powers of seduction, and, in Rabid, her character becomes the carrier to a fatal and mysterious virus. Chambers' link to sexuality and, especially pornographic sexuality, can be broadened within a closer examination of Cronenberg's construction of the film. During her bloodlust, Rose becomes a predator, and approaches victims who, almost comically, represent clichéd characters from pornographic narratives. A police officer, a truck driver, a young womanizer and a beautiful young woman in a hot tub all become casualties to Rose's uncontrollable appetite. Thus, the presence of Chambers is acknowledged through the situations and framing of the film, and the link between the sexually promiscuous woman and disease is made clear. Cronenberg suggests, through intertextual irony and his choice of Marilyn Chambers as the lead, that female sexuality is a very dangerous thing. It is the woman who has the power to spread the disease, the woman who is the monster.

The Brood, another of Cronenberg's early horror works, also plays with forms and conventions of the horror genre for its own subversive goals. And, not surprisingly, also frames female sexuality and female powers of reproduction as something to be feared and ultimately, destroyed.

The Brood centers around Nola, who is a patient at the Somafree Institute of Psychoplasmics, a therapy clinic. There, she is undergoing extreme therapy in which her repressed internal traumas can be "worked through to the end." During this therapy, patients develop welts and sores, literal representations of the internal issues they are dealing with. Nola is in the midst of a divorce from her husband Frank, complete with custody battle over their young daughter, Candy. Meanwhile, small, dwarf-life creatures are on the loose, killing those who have mistreated Nola. "When one dies an autopsy reveals that it is a child without teeth, speech, retinas, sex or a navel. According to the doctor, the 'creature has never really been born'." It turns out that these murderous quasi-children are "physical manifestations of her enraged psyche who have been born directly out of her body. They are connected to her mentally and carry out her unconscious desires, but because her rage is short-lived, so too are the creatures." After several murders, Frank confronts Nola at the institute

and it is revealed that she has grown a sac on the side of her stomach and that this is the origin of the deadly brood. Frank strangles Nola and she and her brood die.

Despite a plot that seems somewhat unconventional in terms of the horror genre, *The Brood* is very much a horror film, supplying the audience with much blood and gore as well as a mystery, as the reveal of who is committing the murders occurs quite late in the film (just like any of the Friday the Thirteenth films, we have to wait until the last reel to find out for sure "who-done-it"). In her book The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis, Barbara Creed draws the connection between the grotesque and the female's natural functions of sex and birth. Creed reads representations of the female in The Brood as subverting feminist concerns and as largely negative. By featuring a woman in isolation, completely removed from her husband, the implication "is that without man, woman can only give birth to a race of mutant, murderous offspring." As well, Creed argues that the film shows female maternal function as abject, unclean and bestial. While her analysis may bend Cronenberg's vision to fit her own sensibilities (she declines to mention that Nola's brood kills her own father and the Freudian implications that act offers up), Creed is spot-on in her analysis of how this horror film uses its ability to present unreal events as reality. "An extreme, impossible situation - parthenogenetic birth - is used to demonstrate the horrors of unbridled maternal power. Parthenogenesis is impossible, but if it could happen, the film seems to be arguing, woman could give birth only to deformed manifestations of herself." Viewed alongside *Rabid*, these films present a problematic representation of the female in the horror film. These women are shown as slaves to their gender, within a paradigm that denies them the opportunity to transcend it and which firmly implies difference, and not in a good way. Instead of falling slave to sexual difference, *Ginger Snaps* allows subtle ambiguities and the experimentation with gender roles to sneak into the narrative, thus producing a more complex, and, as will be argued, more sympathetic portrayal of the female monster in the horror film. And, instead of the female monsters in Cronenberg's filmic world, the monster in *Ginger Snaps* uses her power to challenge firmly set yet negative societal standards.

On the surface, *Ginger Snaps* is a movie about werewolves. Set in Bailey Downs, a fictional small Ontario suburb, the central characters are Brigitte and Ginger Fitzgerald, two sisters who reject the strictly set paradigms of suburban life. Upon introduction, the girls, bored outsiders who are obsessed with death and, more specifically, their own suicides, are putting together a school project, cheerfully titled, "Life in Bailey Downs." It is a photo project depicting the girls posed in bloody and realistic tableaux of suicide aftermath and is the first hardcore indication that *Ginger Snaps* will not be a typical teen movie. One night when the girls are out, Ginger is bit by a mysterious dog-like creature (really a werewolf) and dragged deep into the woods. Ginger and Brigitte manage to escape from the beast and dash across the highway. Luckily, a passing van kills the beast dead. Over the next twenty-eight days, Ginger, under the transformative powers of the werewolf bite and her own physical progression to womanhood (the scent of her first menstruation attracted the beast in the first place), becomes a werewolf. She begins to kill classmates and school employees while awakening to the power of her newfound sexuality. Brigitte discovers a cure for Ginger, but it is too late. During a bloody chase through the girls' bedroom, Ginger, now fully transformed, accidentally impales herself on the knife shakily held by her sister and dies.

Before undergoing a close analysis of *Ginger Snaps*, it is important to point out a subtle yet vital difference between the three films. A central characteristic of all these horror texts involves the female monster. It is important to note that instead of the monsters in these films being fully formed creatures from the outset of the narrative, the characters become monsters either by accident or completely against their own will. In *Rabid*, Rose suffers a horrific motorcycle crash and lapses into a coma. While unaware of what is happening to her body, radical plastic surgery is performed on her, and the result is a vaginal slit hidden in her armpit, armed with an organic, phallic spike that attacks her victims in a quest to satisfy a bloodlust unbeknownst to Rose. *The Brood*'s Nola also begins as a victim. She has enrolled in an experimental and controversial therapy program called psychoplasmics, in which patients revert back to a child-like mentality in order to work through their repressed traumas. The side effect of psychoplasmics is that this repressed rage expresses itself on the patient's body, usually in the form of welts, sores or bruises. Because of Nola's extreme mental state, her trauma manifests itself as eyeless, sexless, toothless children who carry out her unconscious anger on those who have wronged her. Again, for much of the film, she is unaware that she is the cause of such extreme acts of violence. Ginger in *Ginger Snaps* initially suffers a similar fate. On a nighttime revenge mission with her sister Brigitte, Ginger suddenly realizes that she has begun to menstruate for the first time. Before she can do anything at all, the scent of her menstruation attracts a werewolf, and she is dragged deep into the woods where the beast claws and bites her. Ginger, shocked and traumatized, is in denial about what has happened. When her wounds begin to heal faster than humanly possible and she sprouts course hairs on her chest and legs and begins to snack on neighbourhood dogs, Ginger does not like what she is doing and perceives it as a part of her transformation into womanhood. This narrative similarity must not be read as a coincidence, but again suggests the power of the female's sexuality within the horror genre, even when the subjects themselves are unaware of the extent of said power.

However, in *Ginger Snaps*, the female discovers that she is a monster earlier than the characters in Cronenberg's films. This allows for more subversive possibilities as the filmmakers, using the monster as a poetic license, fully engage with the thematic possibilities. And, *Ginger Snaps* is the only film of the three to present what is happening to the female as monstrous as opposed

to the simplification of the woman as monstrous - an important difference that begs further examination. With the audience's suspension of disbelief secured through familiar horror genre territory, the film deals subversively with issues of idealized location, female sexual maturation, gender-based sex roles, aggressive male desire, the effects of sexual promiscuity, and the female as monster.

Ginger and Brigitte live in what should be teenage utopia - a clean, crime-free, well-kept suburb. The girls go to a good school and live firmly within a secure nuclear family unit. However, in *Ginger Snaps*, the suburbs are portrayed as the complete opposite of paradise. Come nightfall, the streets of Bailey Downs fall prey to the "beast of Bailey Downs," and mutilated dogs litter the backyards and sporting fields of the community. The opening frames of the film reinforce this theme. The nearly silent sequence begins with idyllic shots of rows upon rows of perfectly manicured homes and gardens. A woman is shown raking up leaves in her yard while her young son plays in his sandbox. A close-up of the young boy, smiling and puttering in the sand is followed by the boy looking at an object in his hand with confusion and trepidation. He scratches his nose and leaves a bright red streak of what appears to be blood on his otherwise spotless face. The woman smiles and lackadaisically approaches to see what her son is up to. She finds the severed paw of a dog in his hand and frantically tosses it aside. Seconds later, she finds the corpse of Baxter, the family dog, and begins screaming. These suburbs are anything but safe and secure. As well, the girls' lives are anything but ideal before Ginger snaps. Both girls are considered "ugly," "losers," and are self-proclaimed outsiders. They share a mantra, "out by sixteen or dead in this scene, but together forever," and consider school, family and even venturing out of their bedrooms to be torturous and pointless. Most horror films set in suburbia show the perfect lives of the characters shattered by the sudden arrival of the monster, but in *Ginger Snaps*, the monsters are multiplied and the environment begins as anything but perfect. By denying a recognizable status quo and showing a dystopic vision of suburban life that only gets worse, the film subversively hints at what might be lurking behind those white-picket fences and perfectly manicured rose bushes, and it is not pretty.

Perhaps the most blatant issue dealt with in the film is the linking of female sexual maturation to the monstrous. Horror theorists have noticed that adolescent viewers are often most responsive to these types of films and perhaps subconsciously link the bodily changes of puberty to the macabre transformations present in these texts. Aforementioned theorist Crane makes several references to these concepts, "all images of scary fiends are generated by society to calm adolescent anxiety over sexual maturation… as sexual desire grows, or, more accurately, ceases to be successfully repressed or sublimated, the adolescent finds him- or herself overwhelmed by some very powerful and very mystifying urges. Society answers this confusion with appropriate instruction in how to deal with nascent sexual desire via the mythic horror film." Significantly, Crane sees horror movies as texts in which adolescent viewers can find a safe haven from reality, and see something to really worry about. Who can stress about a pimple when there is a zombie knocking down your front door?

In *Ginger Snaps*, this concept is largely subverted. The scene in which Ginger is attacked begins with Ginger and Brigitte discovering a mutilated dog in the middle of a children's playground. Brigitte notices some blood on Ginger's leg, Ginger lifts her skirt to inspect, and responds, "I just got the curse… kill yourself to be different and your own body screws you." Seconds later, Ginger is gone, her screams echoing through the woods. Brigitte and Ginger are now separated in both physicality and location. In this scene, the onset of menstruation is shown as overwhelming, scary and solitary - a surprise attack. A final return to Crane's ideas reinforces this, "once adrift in the agony of adolescence, our earliest fears are summarily reawakened when our bodies cease to be our own. We must have some explanation for the singularly peculiar experience of losing the able and unblemished flesh that so faithfully carried us through our halcyon childhood days." The scene brilliantly juxtaposes symbols of childhood, the swings and jungle gym of the park, with the terror of bloodshed and the unknown woods. Later in the film, Ginger continues to gush blood from her vagina, and it is unclear whether it is the werewolf bite or her own perfectly natural pubescent progression that is the culprit. Ginger also sprouts strange hairs on her body and suffers wild mood swings, and again both causes are left ambiguous. Before she realizes that she is becoming a werewolf, Ginger is offended by Brigitte's implication that her changing body could be abnormal, "I just got my period. I've got weird hairs, so what? That means I've got hormones, and they may make me butt-ugly, but they don't make me a monster." For the viewer, the film might not be plausible throughout, but because Ginger's transformations are concurrent, the safe haven of earlier texts is denied.

The film also critiques the support systems in place for young women in the process of negotiating the potentially scary time of adolescence. When Ginger pays a visit to the school first aid office, the nurse, with a Stepford-smile, says, "I'm sure it seems like a lot of blood; it's a period! Everyone seems to panic their first time. A thick, syrupy, voluminous, discharge is not uncommon. The bulk of the uterine lining is shed within the first few days. Contractions - cramps - squeeze it out like a pump. In three to five days, you'll find lighter, bright red bleeding, that may turn to a brownish or blackish sludge that signals the end of the flow… expect it every twenty-eight days, give or take, for the next thirty years." Ginger's trip to the nurse does nothing to ease her menstruation anxiety, and guidance from her clueless mother fails to help either. Authorities of feminine crisis are framed as terrifying in their own way - there is nowhere for Ginger to turn for advice or a real, empathetic guide through the "curse" of womanhood. The film, thus, subverts the idea that there is anything natural or easy about this rite of passage.

Ginger Snaps also challenges gender-based sex roles. Once bitten, Ginger undergoes a sexual awakening and begins to question firmly set mores of teenage sexuality. This is most clearly shown through scenes set on the field hockey grounds. As part of their mandatory gym class, Ginger and Brigitte are forced to play the game, although they usually spend their time sneakily smoking on the sidelines. During the games, a group of boys sit in the bleachers and objectify the girls playing before them, reinforcing the boys as dominant and predatory players in the larger game of sexual politics. The boys admire Ginger's "rack" and instruct the girls to run past them and showcase their bodies for inspection. Before Ginger's transformation, she is an object to be looked at, nervously turning away when she attracts the gaze of Jason, one of the boys. Later, after Ginger's sexual awakening, she instigates a relationship with Jason and takes control of the dominant, male-centric role. When the couple fools around in the backseat of Jason's car, Ginger treats Jason as the object for her to judge and control. Consider the following exchange between Ginger and Jason:

Jason: Hey, hey, take it easy. We've got all night.
Ginger: Sorry, you just taste really good.
Jason: Just lie back and relax.
Ginger: You lie back and relax!
Jason: Who's the guy here?
Ginger: Who's the guy here? Who's the fucking guy here?

Ginger then proceeds to have her way with Jason, biting his face and neck while pinning him to the seat of the car. Gender expectations are turned on their head and the objectifying male becomes objectified in a feminist, poetic justice, horror-show. Jason is punished for his insensitivity towards women and his aggressive male desire. This punishment deepens when it is discovered that Jason, too, has been "infected" with the werewolf virus. The next day at school, Jason discovers a spot of blood on his trousers and, during a trip to the washroom, finds blood instead of urine when he stands at the urinal. The film, through its fictional werewolf narrative, is able to show the male experiencing what it must be like for a female to discover her first menstruation. Again, gender roles are subversively twisted. This subplot, much like in *Rabid*, also acts as a cautionary tale of the dangers of unprotected sex and the effects of sexual promiscuity.

Ginger as monster becomes a vehicle for a more predatory sexuality. She arrives at school dressed in a short skirt and tight shirt, presenting herself as an object for her own pleasure instead of waiting to be notices. During an exchange with a group of boys, Ginger ironically flaunts her powers of seduction. She asks the boys if they will be attending a party that night, then rips open her coat to reveal her breasts and says, "I'm in charge of the prizes. You too could be a winner," before leaving the shocked boys behind. The link between Ginger's violence at the hand of her transformation into werewolf is clearly linked to her transformation into woman. After the murder of a school janitor, Ginger tries to explain to Brigitte how it feels to unleash all hidden desires, "It feels so good, Brigitte. It's like touching yourself. You know every move, right on the fucking dot. And after, it's fucking fireworks, supernovas. I'm a goddamn force of nature." To Ginger, releasing repressed urges most strongly manifests itself in terms of sex and violence, often at the same time. During the final chase sequence of the film, Ginger, fully transformed into a werewolf (read: a mature woman), runs through her house in search of gratifying her urges. During her rampage, a photo of Ginger as a child is knocked from the wall and the glass shatters, completing her transformation and revealing the necessity for the idyllic landscape of childhood to be left behind for good, shattered like shards of glass that can never be repaired.

Finally, *Ginger Snaps* can be read as subversive in terms of film form and other intertextual references. This is a werewolf film that very much knows it is a werewolf film. Early in the film, Brigitte studies old examples of werewolf films, diligently taking notes. The characters in the film are familiar with all sorts of werewolf clichés, from the silver bullet and "howling at the moon" to the actual "technical" name for the werewolf, lycanthrope. Also, when Brigitte is desperately looking for a cure for Ginger, she acknowledges and rejects the cinematic mythology, demanding, "Let's just forget the Hollywood rules." This seditious element of the film helps to enrich and draw out many of the other dissident themes addressed above. It also encourages the viewer to look beyond the established formulas of the werewolf film and see not only the surface, but the subtext as well.

All three of these subversive Canadian horror films reach a similar conclusion, the woman as monster dies. The Cronenberg texts retread familiar patriarchal and anti-feminist ground and reveal a mandate that reinforces established negative stereotypes of female sexuality. But *Ginger Snaps*, by using the werewolf myth as a metaphor for adolescence, treads into new and fascinating terror film territory. Not only does the female character explore feminist issues, the film subverts gender roles and audience expectations and sets a precedent for the rich depth of possibilities the horror genre can, and should, explore.

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Blurring the Boundaries: Auteurism & Kathryn Bigelow

Brenda Wilson

Born in California in 1952, Katherine Bigelow is one of the few women directors working in Hollywood today. She is exceptional because she works primarily within the traditionally male- dominated genres of the action cinema. Bigelow's films often reflect a different approach to these genres as she consistently explores themes of violence, voyeurism and sexual politics. Ultimately she seems to be concerned with calling the boundaries between particular genres into question. Bigelow's visual style echoes this thematic complexity, often introducing elements of an art-house aesthetic. Bigelow emerged from the New York art scene in the 1970s, having won a Whitney Scholarship to study painting. She later transferred to the Columbia Film program. Critics such as Yvonne Tasker have commented on the amalgamation of spectacle and adrenaline with more thoughtful analysis typical of Bigelow's cinema "what is so distinctive about her movies; an artful immersion in generic popular culture that is simultaneously stylish, seemingly ironic, but also deeply romantic"(Wallflower, 46). Bigelow's subsequent career has been marked by her immersion in her projects, bringing her experience in the visual arts to striking cinematic effect. Like her first two films (*The Loveless*, 1983 and *Near Dark*, 1987), *Blue Steel* clearly disturbs generic expectations and audience conceptions of gender. Bigelow has stated that "it all began with the idea of doing a woman action film. Not only has no woman ever done an action thriller, no woman has ever been at the center of one as the central character"(Smith, 21). Throughout the film Bigelow plays with the notion of Jamie Lee Curtis's Megan as "woman", highlighting the place of both the actress and the character in a traditionally male role. The opening shots of the film show Curtis putting on her police uniform; the frilly lace of her bra at odds with the crisp lines of the uniform, 'masculine' and 'feminine' attire are starkly juxtaposed. Curtis's character becomes decidedly androgynous, a recurring motif in *Point Break* and *Strange Days*, but a motif she ultimately abandons in her more recent films *The Weight of Water* (2000) and *K19: The Widowmaker* (2002). The figure of the androgynous female who is capable of violence is a recurrent one throughout Bigelow's films, the association of the two often combining to give an erotic charge. This is made explicit in *Blue Steel*: the killer Eugene's fixation on Megan is linked to her possession of, and ability to use her gun (leaving the film wide open to psychoanalytical and feminist readings).

The 1991 film *Point Break* is Bigelow's biggest commercial success, perhaps because it mostly conforms to its action genre. The film focuses on the relationship between Keanu Reeves' Johnny Utah, an FBI agent, and his chief suspect in a series of bank robberies, Patrick Swayze, the surfer cum guru whose spirituality is based upon the adrenalin junkies need to confront death in order to feel truly alive. It's examination of masculine relations and the lines between right and wrong is complimented by testosterone infused action sequences. Bigelow's familiar group of outsiders living by different rules are presented here as whole- heartedly cool. And the aesthetic style of the film is indicative of Bigelow's increasingly idiosyncratic choices that create arresting images and innovative action sequences. *Strange Days* (1995) is the film in Bigelow's *oeuvre* that has received the most critical and theoretical attention, and so for the purposes of this analysis it will be referred to but not fully theorized. *Strange Days* is a neo-*noir* science fiction film that presents the future on the eve of the new millennium, a dystopic Los Angeles which is on the verge of erupting into a race war. The film was a critical if not commercial success, building upon recognizable Bigelow motifs. The film is a rich tapestry of narrative threads, stunning visuals and soundtrack, all of which compete for attention. Perhaps this dense layering of material fighting for audience attention explains the film's lack-lustre reception. *Strange Days*, in line with Bigelow's other films, also switches traditional roles. Here the hero Lenny Nero (Ralph Fiennes) is largely ineffective, the action role being played by Angela Bassett as Mace, a kick- boxing security specialist. Interestingly, in a storyline reminiscent of Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* (1960), the film deals in part with a murderer who films his kills and through SQUID technology relays the images and emotions back to his victims. The bathroom scene featuring rape and murder caused controversy on release, and in the same manner as *Peeping Tom*, raises questions of voyeurism, relating it to the wider context of the cinema audience.

One of Bigelow's more recent films demonstrates her tendency to transcend or blur generic boundaries, *The Weight of Water* (2000)is a historical murder mystery, a thriller based on Anita Shreve's critically acclaimed novel and stars Catherine McCormack, Sean Penn and Sarah Polley. It juxtaposes two stories and draws thematic comparisons between each. The first, which is set in 1873 and told in flashback, focuses on a murder and trial in New England. The second takes place over a hundred years later and revolves around a journalist who is writing a story about the case. Bigelow is significant, not just as an all too rare successful female director working within Hollywood, but as a director who manages to combine thematic complexity, technological experimentation and a sophisticated visual style with a more populist approach. What follows is an analysis of Bigelow as an interesting and at times problematic example of a contemporary Hollywood auteur, who is that much more uncharacteristic because she is a woman working within the traditionally male dominated genre of action cinema. Violence, both implicit and explicit, is an integral part of all her films, but is violence something that lends itself to authorial purpose or defies it ?

Despite the apparent contradictions evident across Bigelow's body of work, there are a number of qualities that lend themselves to a conception of her 'signature'. These include the ongoing interrogation of gender, of the arguable essences of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' and the

concomitant embodiment of androgyny by several of her protagonists; the examination of technology not as fundamental to human progress, but as a tool used, and misused by those in positions of authority, power, and /or law enforcement; the self- conscious fascination and manipulation of the cinematic gaze; and the transgression of traditional genre boundaries (resulting in hybridized texts that resist easy classification). Critics and academics have had difficulty theoretically situating Bigelow and Bigelow herself plays with her status as an auteur. For example, there is a striking physical resemblance between Liz Hurley/ Catherine McCormack/ Kathryn Bigelow. Hurley and McCormack are two central characters in *The Weight of Water*, which is a very self- reflexive text that probes the psychologies of people who make their livings as writers/ poets/ photographers. Bigelow has created several female characters who embody both femininity and authority. One thinks of Megan Turner's prowess with a gun, and Angela Bassett as Mace in *Strange Days*, the physically imposing protector of the effeminate Lenny Nero (Ralph Fiennes). Bigelow is exemplary of a female director who works not only within mainstream Hollywood cinema, but also within the traditionally male dominated genre of the action film, that in her hands, undergoes a transformation toward the creation of a new cinematic text.

Deleuze has theorized the action- image, and some of his ideas facilitate a more thorough consideration of the action- image in Bigelow's cinema:

> What constitutes realism is simply this: milieux and modes of behaviour, milieux which actualize and modes of behaviour which embody. The action- image is the relation between the two and all the varieties of this relation. It is this model which produced the universal triumph of the American cinema (Islam, 93).

The generic labels used to describe Bigelow's films are invoked not without irony, as within them genres undergo a certain metamorphosis. The tradition of the genre film is one which explicitly informs Bigelow's work, yet the acknowledgment of generic specificity and codes becomes possible largely because of Bigelow's deviation from and transformation of them. The idea of the genre film is not sustained through conventional genre films but rather through films about genres and generic codes. These are articulated largely through excess, dislocation, and the conjuncture of seemingly incompatible registers.

Auteurism does not stand in contradiction to structuralism, poststructuralism or other theories such as psychoanalysis. It is useful to examine Bigelow's films from various perspectives, and psychoanalysis and structuralism are relevant to an analysis of the text of Blue Steel. Structuralism is concerned with immanent relations/ functions constituting language (and other symbolic/ discursive bodies) as a system. The systemic is realized through binary oppositions; their elements are defined by their differential value. Narrative discourse is one of these binary machines by which society specifies and attempts to establish such ideological unities as masculine and feminine identification. When Jamie Lee Curtis dresses as the law and employs her revolver in defense of the law, the film mobilizes a range of divergent subjectivities that preclude the failure of classical narrative closure. D.N. Rodowick argues that psychoanalysis understands the development of sexual identity as an experience of division and loss and that:

> any attempt to associate subjectivity with criteria of unity, coherence, or mastery, especially as one side of a binary equation, is meaningless… From the perspective of psycho-analysis understanding of sexual identity, the goal is to understand the range of scenarios that describe the different experiences of division and loss where sexual positions are constructed (Self, 92).

The image of castration is the central trope of the film, the revolver heavily weighted, it's symbolism in excess of what the narrative requires, therein becoming the fetishized object representative of the phallus whose power in classic narrative structures usually rests in the hands of men. The terms agent and recipient, subject and object, active and passive, sadism and masochism, and masculine and feminine blur and baffle in their references. Bigelow's decision to muddy traditional representations of gender and what meanings those representations imply emerges at the beginning of the film, in the three brief scenarios that set the narrative in motion: the castration joke, the precredit sequence, and the credit sequence.

In the castration joke a prostitute accidentally bites down on man and proceeds to sew the penis back on backwards. The joke, it's telling by Detective Nick Mann, and its central trauma constitute an unresolved anxiety about sexual identity and power, guilt and retribution that dominates the film. The film opens with a hand-held camera tracking down a long narrow hall behind a police officer who is approaching a closed door. The sounds of a woman can be heard. The officer breaks into the scene of domestic violence and shoots the man. The woman, then, surprisingly, shoots the officer. The scene dissolves into the theatricality of a police academy test for cadet Megan Turner, but it foreshadows Megan's later intervention in her father's physical abuse of his wife. It is also a precursor for one of the opening scenarios in *Point Break*, in which Keanu Reeves, as FBI agent Johnny Utah, performs a shooting exercise as a performance test. In *Blue Steel*, this scenario introduces Megan into the space constituted by the institution of the law. Her failure to assume the role of liberating officer of the law in the fiction is marked by the 'shooting' of the female cop by the abused wife. Her failure is further marked by her failure of the test, as the instructor says with heavy sarcasm, "you killed the husband and the wife shot you" (Self, 96)). The credits then roll over a series of slow- motion images,

> that examine in extreme close-up a police .38 special and then look into its empty cylinders and watch its loading and finally its holstering - an emptiness then a fullness, a presence then a hiding in plain sight. The revolver is fetishized and eventually transformed into a receptacle for male desire, particularly in the scene when Eugene is raping Megan and using the revolver as a fetishized symbol of power. The scrutiny of the gun yields to the spectacle of Megan dressing in her police uniform, still in slow- motion, close-

up cinematography accompanied by a droning electronic music that connotes another imaginary reality (Self, 96).

The first shot tightly frames a woman's chest; as previously mentioned, Megan's lacy brassiere disappears as she buttons the front of a police uniform blouse. This is also a concrete representation of the gender blurring Bigelow seeks in several of her films in which she deliberately casts and shoots women and men as androgynous figures rather than clearly sexualized ones. The close- ups reveal different parts of her body- blouse, boots, gloves and hat- captured in a rapt slow- motion close- up gaze. The camera finally assumes the place of a mirror. "The images culminate in a medium shot of Megan staring directly into the lens of the camera as she straightens her cap, a look of satisfaction on her face as she stares into the mirror of the spectator's eyes, the specular (female) other as the law" (Self, 97). Bigelow has overturned traditional representations of gender through the simple fact of putting the power of the phallus, embodied by the gun, in the hands of Megan Turner. Her manipulation of that power encounters failures and successes throughout the narrative. When Eugene Hunt (Ron Silver) sees Turner gun down the robber in the convenience store, "without blinking an eye", he is enthralled by the authority with which she wields the gun. When the robber's gun, shot in slow motion, spins to the floor not far from where Eugene is sprawled on his stomach, he pockets the gun and sets in motion the remainder of the narrative.

Blue Steel typifies Bigelow's tendency to subvert the cinematic codes and conventions that identify both genres and genders. In *Blue Steel* it is a woman at the center of the cop thriller. She embodies the power and authority of the law. The number of films at the beginning of the 1990s " that thrust women into figures of the law reflect many problems of identity surrounding the changing status of women in the culture" (Self, 104). Some of these films include, *Impulse* (Locke, 1990), *The Silence of the Lambs* (Demme, 1991), *V.I. Warshawski* (Kanew, 1991) and *A Stranger Among Us* (1992). Most of these films enact traditional narratives that are structured around conflict and its resolution, guilt and punishment. *Blue Steel* activates instabilities of sexual difference without containing them. The viewer might expect a narrative trajectory organized around investigation, capture/ punishment and so on, but the organization of Bigelow's film deconstructs those connections, turning Megan's act of law enforcement into a motive for her investigation by that law. The supermarket robbery that sets the narrative in motion results in Turner being suspended, in effect losing the authority whose uniform she wears. At one point it also appears as though Megan will be blamed for Eugene's crimes, particularly the break-in that he stages in order to suggest his victimization. When Eugene's crimes are blamed on Megan, those crimes initiate Megan's punishing investigation of Eugene while simultaneously desiring her punishment and punishing her desire. One must also reflect on the deeper theme of female victimization, for example Megan's mother still in an abusive marriage, Megan's witnessing of Eugene gunning down her best friend, and Eugene's shooting of Nick after Nick and Megan have made love, in effect punishing Megan for experiencing any pleasure at all. The message seems to be that to be aggressive is to be transgressive, is to unleash a force of repression and hostility of which the transgression is both cause and target. It would seem that to be woman, active or passive, is to be a victim. "What finally is central to sexual identity in Blue Steel is the constant veneration, contestation, and instability of authority" (Self, 105). *Blue Steel* critiques the power embodied by institutions of authority as does Bigelow's next film, *Point Break*.

Contextually, the film appears at a particular juncture in American cinema when the 'hard bodies' that populated the 1980s action movies were being replaced by a 'new man'. Bigelow was conscious of these hyper- masculine representations from the Reagan-Republican era, and is one of the first directors to re-shape and re-imagine masculine identity (although films of the 1970s also seem to be a reference point). Third, *Point Break* re-imagines and transcodes the visual and narrative conventions of the action film. The film is a breathless text of attractions. It might even fit Linda Williams conception of the 'body genre' because the film revels in exhibiting bodily excess. Further, the film is a knowing, playful and at times subversive staging of the action film. "Bigelow is playing with film form, invigorating the process of spectatorship, and self-consciously referring us to her own authorship and the constructed nature of film representations" (Redmond, 109).

Basically, *Point Break* stages a confrontation between two cultures. The FBI represents a bureaucratic, time-bound, law- abiding, individualist culture. Representative of the dominant culture? In contrast to the FBI machine is the counter-culture of the surfers, bohemians, existing outside of time, community- based, law- breakers. Bigelow has said:

> The unique thing about surfing is that it kind of exists outside the system, the people that embody it are of their own mind set, they have their own language, dress code, conduct, behaviour and it's very primal, very tribal. I tried to use surfing as a landscape that could offer a subversive mentality (Redmond, 109).

The opening shots of the film are of the ocean, the surf, bathed in the orange glow of dusk , a warm, tranquil expansive set of images. A series of shots of an idealized, balletic surfer (Bodhi) gliding on the waves follows as water literally pours over the camera. From the beginning of *Point Break*, there is constant camera movement, including the incessant movement of what is in front of the camera. The titles flow into one another, the star names dissolve into one another, and the slow motion photography effects a sense of the narrative unfolding outside of time, or irrespective of the limitations time necessarily imposes upon us. Absolute spatial and existential freedom is connoted here. The sequence continues with what seems to be parallel action, Keanu Reeves in the rain, loading a rifle and preparing to fire. The blue light, gray drizzle and the low- key lighting of the land based mise-en-scene

stands in stark contrast to the limitless ocean. A whistle blows, a click of a stop watch, and one is reminded of the opening of Blue Steel, when Megan Turner (Jamie Lee Curtis) has to respond to an armed domestic dispute, and even Clarice Starling (Jodie Foster) throwing herself into the physical and psychological demands of an assault course that begins Jonathan Demme's *The Silence of the Lambs*. These are women-centered cop movies, failure is implicit in their efforts, but for Utah, his shooting is "perfect".

Bodhi and Utah are representative of the opposition between surfer and cop that Bigelow stages throughout *Point Break*, an opposition that ultimately appraises the counter- culture more favorably than the institutional white authority Utah enacts. Bodhi surfs in an endless ocean, captured in slow- motion, accentuating the timelessness that connotes the freedom experienced by the surfers. The blue hum of the synth score heightens the romanticism with which these scenes are shot. By contrast, Utah is chasing 'real' time (he has to beat the clock to prove his skill as an FBI agent). Utah is both defined and confined by the law and order machine which he serves:

> The sound of the heavy rain, and the gunshots are aural, staccato punctuation notes that shatter the romance of the music that carries across the two planes of action. Utah's representation, characterization and performance can be read as a clearly signaled, knowing, excessive parody of the hyper-masculine male (Redmond, 112).

It is the constructed nature of his masculinity that is actually being foregrounded in this scene. The way Bigelow shoots Reeves as well as the boyish star image Reeves embodies establish his performance as a simulacrum, as artificially constructed as the cardboard characters he shoots to prove his eligibility for the role of FBI agent. This (highly camp) masculine performance is one that Utah/ Reeves will reject by the closure of the film (the performance then foregrounds and problematizes gender in much the same way as *Blue Steel* and *The Silence of the Lambs*).

The opening sequence foreshadows Bigelow's characterization of masculinity as a constructed identity. Also the conformist, time- bound, technology based dominant culture is represented as brutal and relentless, a machine that cannot win against the freedom portrayed by Bodhi and his community of surfers. Time, technology, and the body are the markers for what is a dystopian critique of the conformist, repressive culture of modern America, transposed onto the FBI (this is akin to the critique of State authorities and figures of law and order in *Strange Days*). The first time that special agent Johnny Utah enters the L.A. headquarters of the FBI, a continuous hand- held steadicam shot follows him around and through the building for about 1 min, 53 seconds of screen time. The movement and kinetic energy of the single shot is meant to capture the hive- like activity of these headquarters and provides a continuum with the opening sequence (it is also a visual trademark for Bigelow). The surfers are the counter- culture that stands as an alternative to this sterile machinery of power that the FBI represents:

When the Ex-presidents surf, and when Bodhi catches his first tube, ecstasy, the pleasure is over-determining. The sounds, the frenzy and the way Bigelow captures this type of carnival, suggests bodies beside themselves with pleasure. Bigelow has said, "Thrill- seeking adrenalin addicts have always fascinated me. The idea seems to be that it's not until you risk your humanness that you feel most human. Not until you risk all awareness do you gain awareness. It's about peak experience" (Redmond, 114).

It is only when Utah and Pappas go with their gut feelings and intuition, finally, that they can close in on the Ex- presidents. The message here is similar to that of *Strange Days*. Where technology over-determines human action, and where mechanical surveillance replaces human interaction, humanity and social difference are threatened. In *Point Break* technology is set against nature; machine against man; regulation against freedom; bureaucracy against individuality; and docility against blood, tissue and bone.

Susan Jeffords has traced the transition from the hard-bodies like Schwarzeneggar, that populated the big screen throughout the 1980s, to the 'new men' of the early 1990s, often new actors capable of sensitivity, generosity and change. In this revisionist cinema, the new man was also encoded to fail in some way. This plays out in *Point Break* in the re-injury Utah suffers at the climax of his first chase sequence following Bodhi. At the crucial moment his knee gives out and he must give up his pursuit. This injury impairs his athletic abilities for the duration of the film, culminating in his futile effort to follow Bodhi across the desert after free- falling from a plane and catching the parachute of Bodhi during his final escape. Along with a representation of this new man, *Point Break* subverts and redefines the action film in two clear ways:

> First, its kinetic, pulsating and thrill- seeking set of encounters is akin to the type of 'body genre' that Williams has reserved for the horror, melodrama, and pornography genres. It is arguable that spectators of Point Break are meant to feel or ride Point Break in ways similar to the protagonists in the film. Second, this over-determination of excess and spectacle, and the textures of irony and parody that ripple through the film, point to the subversion of the genre and to a self- referential critique of the Hollywood machine that produces it (Redmond, 121).

Bigelow's knowing, telling, radical signature is all over the film. *Point Break* is steeped in self-reflexive irony and parody suggesting that the film, on the discursive level, is functioning as a critique of the action genre specifically and the Hollywood machine more generally. The text revisits the theme of androgyny, as Reeves and Petty embody both the fierceness that Petty admires in Reeves, and the skill and mastery Reeves admires in Petty's surfing. The two even look alike. The film is intertextual with bohemian and counter-culture aesthetics. Gary Busey, as Pappas, gives a nod to his role in the surfing movie *The Big Wednesday*. Reeves's intertextuality is most explicit in the scenes when he is collecting hair samples from sun-tanners. One recalls his "dude" language from *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure*. And as aforementioned, Bigelow does appropriate a few key images from *Dirty Harry*, Johnny Utah throwing his shield down in defiance just as Harry Callahan is determined to quit the force. Similarly,

throughout *Point Break* there are a set of cliched authority figures, who deliver a range of cliched lines but because of the manner of the performances and the style of delivery of these lines the cliché is deliberate or conscious. *Point Break* then, is both knowing and critical of the action film and through this offers another way into the film for spectators. However, the real self- reflexivity in the film comes from the action and spectacle sequences, in particular from the skydiving sequences onwards. When Tyler is kidnapped and Utah is in pursuit, the spectator might expect a 'classical' ending. Instead of staging the final contest on the beach or in Bodhi's house, instead of guns and explosions, there is a shoot- out, two extended skydiving sequences and finally a fist fight on an Australian beach. This comprises another forty minutes of screen time. Tyler is nowhere to be seen, the ending a mirror of the opening sequence but with Bodhi and Utah now literally side-by-side. This is deliberately excessive, therein foregrounding the plot contrivances or lack thereof that action films rely on in order to reach kinetic, energetic action sequences. Here, in the absence of any subplot, the spectator becomes aware of their own investment in simply watching the spectacle before them.

Because *Strange Days* (Bigelow, 1995) is the Bigelow film that has received the most critical attention, this cursory analysis of the film is intended only to enunciate the features that make *Strange Days* a distinctly Biglovian film, and the ways the film has been theorized in a way similar to *Point Break*, connecting the experience of viewing *Strange Days* with concepts of sensation and the action-image as theorized by Deleuze. Because of its overwhelming style and catchy soundtrack *Strange Days* can be seen as pure, even excessive entertainment. It is a science fiction film set in a dystopic Los Angeles, on the eve of the new millennium. Like her other films, Bigelow finds an arresting sequence with which to begin her film. A visual blur and a difficult to hear, "boot it", are the only clues that the opening sequence is not real. The spectator shares the subjectivity of a character robbing a restaurant. There are no spatial parameters, strictly a POV shot of what the character is seeing as he is seeing it (it would seem). The police arrive and a chase ensues, culminating across rooftops, where the person whose subjectivity has been objectified plummets to his death. This scene can be linked to the rooftop chase in Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*. Scottie is holding onto his partner's hand as he dangles over the edge and eventually falls, precipitating Scottie's affliction of 'vertigo'. What makes this opening sequence significant is the knowledge that the experience is a simulation, experienced by Lenny Nero, who is wearing a SQUID (superconducting-quantum-interference-device) on his head. Essentially being wired enables the wearer to share the sensory experiences and memories of another person. All the sequences involving SQUID playbacks in the film unfold through a subjective point-of-view shot that instead of enabling the viewer to identify with the subject, actually creates a strangely distant perspective, disturbing because in one sense the spectator is sharing an experience with the character in POV shots that provide no spatial specificity, and in another sense, the spectator knows that the unfolding event is something that is already past. It has occurred, been recorded at some time prior to when the spectator views it. The commodification of memory, or more generally an examination of the constructedness of memories as markers of personal experiences is something that has manifest in other postmodern science fiction films such as *Blade Runner*.

The Weight of Water (Bigelow, 2000) is the first film in which Kathryn Bigelow did not have an active role in writing the script. In fact the film was based on the best- selling novel by Anita Shreve. It is the first Bigelow film based on a literary adaptation, and the changes the narrative undergoes can probably be attributed to her intentions regarding how she wanted to visually translate the book for the screen. It is also the first Bigelow film that could be categorized as historical drama, two narrative strands whose trajectories unfold a century apart, but both of which concern the brutal murders of two Dutch women settlers on the Isles of Shoals. The story is being re-visited in the present by a young journalist whose brother-in-law owns a yacht and volunteers to take her and her husband Thomas to the island for the weekend. What some critics have focused on, in the generally negative reception the film received in the press, is the fact that the film does not conform to the "idea" of "Kathryn Bigelow - Hollywood action director". But this kind of criticism is almost meaningless because it is evaluating the film based on preconceived notions and expectations a reviewer brings to the viewing of a Bigelow film. It is becoming more and more clear that Bigelow is participating in her own construction as an auteur by deliberately choosing film projects that depart from her previous works. She not only blends film genres within any given film, she also subverts audience expectations of the kind of film she will make, therein deconstructing her own auteur status. Some critics complained that the dual narratives were not connected persuasively, while others suggested that a mainstream audience might find the fractured structure distancing. The film occupies a border space between art cinema and Hollywood, a position Bigelow often occupies but one that might disappoint those spectators wanting Hollywood spectacle.

Although *The Weight of Water* does not belong to the action genre, the film can be evaluated alongside other Bigelow films, re-confirming her auteur status. Because another element found in most of her films is melodrama. Despite the melodrama and action genres being genres which are oppositionally 'gendered', their mutual preoccupation with 'excess', in performance, aesthetics and narrative, suggests they nevertheless share much common ground (Jermyn, 132). Indeed, Bigelow is not the first director to combine action and melodrama, the most explicit example of their fusion found in the films of John Woo. While Bigelow can indeed 'do' action, she has also demonstrated a penchant for contemplative and explosive explorations of the textures, tensions, and turbulence of families, relationships and domestic spaces, themes typical of melodrama. In *Blue Steel*, the *mise-en-scene* of the

family runs as a subtext throughout the film, culminating in a scene in which Megan arrests her father for spousal abuse, handcuffs him and begins the drive back to the precinct. En route, her father begs for understanding and eventually Megan succumbs to his pleading and his promises to never hit Megan's mother again. By the time they return home, Eugene, no longer in jail, is sitting in the family living room. Cinematography and editing remove the impotent and abusive father from the scene and replace him with the homicidal and manic 'lover'. Melodrama's critical angle on capitalist and patriarchal institutions has been a part of all of Bigelow's films. The domestic violence endured by Megan's mother in *Blue Steel* is the primary reason she became a cop; the loaded looks and passionate exchanges between Johnny Utah and Bodhi in *Point Break*'s homoerotically charged central relationship is pure melodramatic excess; and Lenny's refusal to relinquish his failed love affair in *Strange Days* is as fundamental to his characterization as are his SQUID dealings. Families recurrently carry within them secrets and tragedies in Bigelow's films and women often bear the brunt of their destructiveness.

Feminists continue to endeavor to claim Bigelow as one of their own, an assignation Bigelow vehemently resists. *The Weight of Water*, like her other films, is challenging to locate within a female perspective. It is an adaptation of a novel by a woman, and Shreve enjoys a large and loyal female readership. The lead protagonist in each of its two narratives is female and a female point of view is inscribed through a number of devices; two sets of female voice-overs, the use of Jean's camera to give her point of view (freeze-framing the action and rendering it black and white, though this device dwindles as the film progresses) and the curious mirroring and intermingling of the two women's stories across time and space. In each of their stories care is taken to expose the tensions and struggles of their daily lives, particularly Maren's life as a fisherman's wife caught in a life of banality and drudgery. Over a hundred years later, Jean is married to a Pullitzer Prize-winning poet but is a successful photographer in her own right. It is remarked that when they first met, Thomas felt they were similar creatures, both trying to stop time. And although Jean is comfortable, she is jealous and emotionally repressed. Both women are dour and introspective, not characters to gain sympathy easily. And both women are tainted by their complicity in the suffering of other women, even before the revelation that Maren was responsible for the hideous deaths of Karen and Anethe. But more troubling to critics than the characterization of Maren as duplicitous and monstrous, was the scene on the boat in which Adaline, played by Liz Hurley, runs an ice cube over her topless body while Thomas and Jean watch themselves watching her. If one examines the scene it is not necessarily an example of the kind of objectification typical of Hollywood. The lingering excess and laboured exchange of looks is a kind of self- conscious and critical commentary on cinematic voyeurism by Bigelow. This kind of reading can be supported by the acting choice for the role of Adaline. Elizabeth Hurley was a cover girl and former face of Estee Lauder, as well as the girlfriend of famous actor Hugh Grant. As the focal point for the tensions and exchanges of looks on the boat, Hurley adds another element of reflexivity to the role and suggests that Bigelow might be using her as a way of interrogating the objectifying gaze of cinema.

Kathryn Bigelow may be the only female director working within the parameters of mainstream Hollywood cinema. But even this pronouncement is complicated by Bigelow's tendency to infuse traditional forms such as the action or science fiction genre, with an art-house sensibility. Her most recent cinematic endeavor was *K-19: The Widowmaker*. The film is based on the true story of the "1961 maiden voyage of Russia's first nuclear ballistic submarine that suffered a reactor malfunction at the bottom of the north Sea, threatening to bring the world's superpowers to the brink of nuclear war"(Jermyn, 12). But the film met a mixed reception. Bigelow's auteur status continues to be contested. Her work within and around the margins of Hollywood cinema has proven contentious and innovative, "perplexing and inspiring, traveling a number of tumultuous career highs and lows along the way" (Jermyn,19). This analysis has focused on those attributes of Kathryn Bigelow's cinema that support her auteur status. The depiction of violence in her films is linked to a particular passion. Regarding violence she has said:

It goes back to the voyeuristic need to watch and the Freudian idea that you want to view what you've been denied. You don't want to watch what you can always see- you want to see something that is transporting in some way, either frightening or some other reaction (Smith, 26).

But theorizing her cinema should not be limited to any singular theory. Her films lend themselves to different perspectives that include feminism, psychoanalysis, queer theory and cultural studies. The definitive aspect of her cinema is her ability to transcend those limitations imposed upon her by traditional cinematic forms, categorical imperatives attributed to her films by critics, and audience expectations of what a Bigelow film should look like.

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Violence in The City of God: The Fantasy of the Omniscient Spectator

Jennie Carlsten

"A picture could change my life. But in the City of God, if you run away, they get you, and if you stay, they get you too." Kátia Lund and Fernando Meirelles' *City of God* offers a variety of explanations for the violence it depicts, but ultimately presents violence - within the city and within its characters - as something beyond representation, comprehension, or escape. Motives are suggested, but shown to be insufficient to account for the level and pervasiveness of violence. Alternatives to violence are articulated, only to be undermined. The formal strategies adopted by *City of God* are themselves violent, resisting easy synthesis or understanding. The film places the viewer in a removed spectatorship, suggesting a sense of omniscience and control which proves, in the end, false.

The Nature of the Violence

City of God is narrated by Rocket, a boy growing up in one of Rio's *favelas*, slum towns that exist outside the laws and popular image of Rio. Through a disjointed, redoubling, and multilayered narrative, Rocket tells his constructed version of the City of God, built around the stories of its gang leaders. Through constant acts of violence, of which Rocket is an observer and eventual participant, the youth of the *favela* are connected. While the plot is driven by acts of individual violence, the film evokes a range of violent forces, not confined to the corporeal violence of murder and gang assassination.

Brazil, and Rio in particular, suffers from particularly pervasive and institutionalized forms of violence: gang warfare, military brutality, and police corruption. Despite its natural resources, Brazil is one of the most economically divided countries in the world; a very small wealthy class exists quite separately from a large, poor, underclass. Race and class are equated, so that 'whiteness' has more to do with wealth and status than with colour. The country is still trying to overcome its colonial and militarized histories and to create a national identity, and national cinema, that represents a highly diverse population. Brazil's contemporary national cinema frequently deals with an "…urban reality that is centered in the concept of the 'taken for granted' violence that comes out of a predatory capitalism and so becomes a spectacle." (da Costa, 171) *City of God* is based on real events and figures; adapted from a largely biographical novel by Paulo Lins, the film uses mainly amateur actors, location shooting, and handheld camera work to convey a sense of realism. Meirelles has discussed the film as a criticism not only of Brazilian society, but global economic forces, saying that "no country is as unfair as the world itself." (Gonzales)

Since the Cinema Novo of the 1960s, following on Glauber Rocha's "aesthetic of hunger", violence in all its forms has driven and defined Brazilian cinema. *City of God* promotes no overt political agenda, but in its depiction of poverty and exclusion, refers to the economic and cultural violence of Brazilian society. This is effectively accomplished through the representation of the city as a site of violence. As the title suggests, the film is as much about the geographical place, the *favela*, as any of its occupants. At the start, Rocket's voiceover explains the origin of the *favela*, created when flooding and unrest drove the poor out of Rio's inner city. Rocket also expresses the sense of abandonment and alienation of the residents: "For the powerful our problems didn't matter. We were too far removed." The sense of exclusion is reinforced by the way the film circumscribes the city. By showing all the stories of the *favela* to be interconnected, Meirelles conveys a self-enclosed community isolated from the outside world. The police are the only figures who enter and leave the *favela* at will. The journalists at Rocket's newspaper do not enter the place they write about; it is considered a no-go area for other Brazilians. When a tourist enters the community, he is lost and must be guided, protected and returned to his home. Similarly, the audience engages with the film as a tourist and Meirelles functions as the guide who both points out the sights and offers protection by keeping the spectator at a safe distance.

The *favela* is on one level a defined space with specific geography, straight rows of houses and repeated locations. On another level, it is a landscape with violent and incomprehensible qualities. In chase sequences, for example, camera angles are repeatedly reversed, confusing direction and space. The constantly moving handheld camera is combined with rapid editing to create a sense of disorientation. The dangers of the space are emphasized by seemingly unmotivated camera movements and unattached point of view shots. Shots through gaps and from under objects are reminiscent of war footage and position subjects as if sniper targets, particularly in the later segments of the film. By this time, the area has become a war zone: "you got used to living in Vietnam," narrates Rocket.

While the diegesis never really leaves the city, the hostile urban setting is set in opposition to a utopian rural life by the fantasies of the youth. Characters dream of escaping the *favela* for farmland, a desire which is never realized. The beach provides an isolated image of "picture postcard" Rio, and is a place of refuge for Rocket's teenage 'groovies', friends not (yet) involved in the gang violence. The swimming hole provides another respite from the violence of the city; even here, though, the camera work creates a feeling of surveillance and threat. As a very young Rocket speaks of his hopelessness about a future in the *favela* and his fear of getting shot, that fear is manifested in a long shot of Rocket's back, positioning him as if within a gun sight.

The City of God is plagued by economic as well as physical violence. Attempts by the poor to earn a living are obstructed by the system, as when Rocket is forced to abandon his fish, his family's livelihood, on the side of the road. Crime is, in the early segments of the film, shown as a direct response to poverty. In the first sequence, set in the 1960s, the 'Tender Trio' hold up a gas truck, Robin

Hood style, and give the gas to the poor of the neighbourhood; they also give money to the smaller boys and to their families. For these three, crime is viewed as a means of escape, and is treated humourously and sympathetically.

The *favela* is also a site of gendered violence. The City of God is represented as almost exclusively male, and women's bodies simply provide another site for the men to carry out violence against one another. Meirelles includes women primarily as victims, such as Shorty's wife. After her husband catches her with another man (who flees), he beats her with a shovel, and then buries her alive. The rape of Ned's girlfriend (also unnamed) is framed less as a complete act in itself, but as the instigation of violence, sparking off the full-scale gang war at the film's conclusion. The strongest women of the film, Angelica and Bernice, attempt to reverse this power equation by using their sexual hold over the men, encouraging them to leave the gangs; they are unsuccessful. Both lose the man as a result of his escape attempts, making them both indirect victims of the violence, and indirectly responsible for it.

The *favela* is regulated both by the official police and, more effectively, by the gangs. Under the powerful L'il Ze, the slum experiences a period of relative peace and security. L'il Ze's violence is used to control the passions and impulses of the society. In this way, the gang leader embodies the power of the state and its often brutal policies towards the underclass. In one scene, L'il Ze forces a stranger to strip in front of a crowd, engaging in a different sort of violence, one that evokes the use of authoritarian humiliation and sexual degradation for social control, and also makes a spectacle of the victim's pain. The official police, meanwhile, are shown to be corrupt; in every scene in which they appear, the police take bribes from, steal from, or kill the men of the City of God. In one scene, as two of the Tender Trio hide in the trees after a robbery, two officers argue over how to treat the criminals. One wants to steal the loot; after all, the youth are only "niggers and thieves"; the other wants simply to "exterminate" the men. This dialogue, coupled with the image of the men huddled primitively in the tree branches, calls attention to the way in which they have been dehumanized by the state and by the discourse of the media. There is no justice system within the *favela*; the police act apparently on impulse. Shaggy, a member of the Tender Trio, is pursued and killed on only the word of another criminal, who has just been arrested for the murder of his own wife. The systemic violence of the state, and the fatalism with which it is accepted, is most evident in the film's ending. Although Rocket takes incriminating photographs of the police, he doesn't use the photos, knowing that the paper wouldn't run them or that the repercussions would be too great.

Rocket and his camera represent yet another strain of violence that pervades the *City of God*: scopic violence. In her discussion of another Brazilian film*, A Grande Arte*, Maria Helena Braga e Vaz da Costa characterizes the photographer of that film as a passive figure, one who looks from afar rather than engaging: photography "keeps subject and spectator at a distance, it offers intimacy without risk." (da Costa, 178) In da Costa's view, a photographer protagonist is only a spectator of the violence, comparable to the viewer, not a part of the spectacle. Rocket's use of the camera, though, is quite clearly equated with violence. As a teenager, Rocket uses his photographs the way his associates use their own weapons; to gain status within his 'gang of groovies' and to pursue his love interest, Angelica (who is interested not in Rocket, but in his ability to make her appear beautiful). Rocket uses the camera to obliterate his rival, Tiago, composing his pictures and directing his subjects so as to throw Tiago into shadow. Rocket's control over the image is literal. L'il Ze's gang cannot work the camera, and do not understand even that the film must be developed before it can be seen, emphasizing the gulf of understanding (and with understanding, power) between those who are photographed and those who do the photographing. His amateur photography becomes the proof of status that allows Rocket safe passage and a measure of respect; while the other characters are perpetually armed with conventional weaponry, Rocket is protected by his camera.

The camera/gun analogy is most explicit in the final standoff. Surrounded by L'il Ze's heavily armed gang and the police, Rocket stands frozen as the camera circles around him. The police leave and the gang clamours for a photo. The sound recedes and the camera continues to circle as Rocket is paralysed by indecision, perhaps considering the act of violence he is about t o commit. Finally he points his own camera at the gang and, as the shutter clicks, blood spurts from the chest of a gang member. Off-screen, Ned's gang has arrived, and the gunfight begins. The editing of the sequence suggests not only that Rocket survives by 'shooting' the others, but that he is directly responsible for the deaths of those shot by real bullets. Rocket photographs the rest of the battle, largely filmed as though through the lens of his camera. The sound and dialogue add to the suggestion that Rocket is an active participant in the violence: gunfire accompanies his own shooting, and a voice shouts "Kill one of those faggots! Blast him!" as he focuses. Meanwhile, the erratic handheld camera reminds the audience of the presence of yet another photographer, the filmmaker. The violent use of Rocket's camera is of course analogous to the use of the camera by Meirelles, who is arguably engaging in violence himself by exploiting the lives of his subjects and glamourizing Rio's carnage. It is further analogous to the nature of media representation in general, and raises questions about media responsibility in the 'society of the spectacle'.

Understanding the Violence

The City of God is filled with violent characters; in fact, it is fair to say that the characters are defined by their relationship to violence. The film has multiple protagonists, and they remain psychologically under-developed. This should not be read as a failure of the film, but an intentional and successful effort to create a story that is about the nature of violence itself.

Rather than everything providing an excuse for war, Rocket tells us "war was an excuse for everything." As the gang war between L'il Ze and Knockout Ned escalates, boys come to the leaders asking for guns. Each has his own agenda and pretext for violence, be it revenge, protection, or a desire for respect. The montage - quickly edited medium close-ups of very young boys, each with a one-sentence request - presents a litany of justification, fading into a slow-motion sequence of distorted sound and images of random corpses.

Meirelles does not legitimize violence (by showing its necessity or efficacy, for instance, or by using it as a narrative solution to evil and disorder), but neither does he condemn violence. The film in fact suggests that violence defies not only representation, but also explanation. Motives are suggested - evilness, vengeance, territorialism, animal instinct, initiation, and self-definition - but none seem adequate to explain the omnipresence of violence in the *favela*. This in turn undermines the audience's ability to mange or account for what Gomel calls the "excess" of violence, that quality of violence which exceeds instrumentality and cannot be explained as a response, but only as a conscious action. (Gomel, xv)

City of God borrows certain conventions of the Western to suggest the theme of the frontier, and violence is, in part, framed by this frontier sensibility. The dusty, brown streets and buildings of the *favela* bring to mind the Western town. Those streets become the locus of shoot-outs framed as Western duels. The hold-up of the gas truck, already mentioned, is coded as a stagecoach robbery: the three men pull bandannas over their faces, wield pistols, and ambush the vehicle - all that is missing is the horses. It has been suggested that the new Brazilian cinema is characterized by a tension between barbarism and civilization, a tension historically located in the Western, and this characterization seems very applicable to *City of God*. The few women in the film (like a Western, this is primarily a film about men) are presented as a civilizing influence, encouraging the men to leave the barbarism behind and choose a farm and family. Here, barbarism wins out, and the women are removed from the narrative once they have failed in their civilizing attempts.

Western style vengeance is presented as a motivator for much of the film's violence. The cyclical nature of revenge is emphasized: each killing sparks another, almost to the point of narrative absurdity, and the connections are not always immediately explained. Vengeance is the justification that the characters themselves express, offering revenge as a moral absolute. Knockout Ned, who appears first as a potential role model who espouses "peace and love", is driven to an act of revenge by the rape of his girlfriend and the attack of his homestead and family. Audience expectations of the Western hero (like the 'good man' turned vigilante found in so many action films) may lead viewers to sympathize with Ned, judging his violence as less excessive than L'il Ze's. Meirelles problematizes this identification by showing the escalating nature of Ned's violence. At first, Ned is opposed to taking "innocent" lives; he insists that he is not a hoodlum, but a seeker of vengeance. After a couple of 'necessary' killings during robberies, "the exception becomes the rule", as Rocket tells us, and Ned becomes indiscriminate in his killing. Apparently, Ned has found in violence not only an instrument, but a source of pleasure.

The film suggests that violence is also motivated by territorial instincts. Unlike the (flawed) Western ideal of land for the taking, territory in the *favela* is contested. One segment of the film, The Story of the Apartment, interrupts the ongoing narrative to detail the way the space has changed hands, each occupant being violently forced out by his or her successor. Benny's farewell party is an act of transgression, in that he brings together (unnaturally, it is suggested) groups from different areas of the *favela* as well as from different social groups: the religious, the samba followers, the jazz lovers, the hippies, and the rival gangs. Benny's attempt at blurring the rigid class and social divisions brings all Brazilians together in what at first seems a carnivalesque utopia, but instead ends tragically with his death. As L'il Ze cries over Benny's body, the crowds disappear, presumably returning to their own territory and isolated experiences.

The story of the apartment points to other aspects of the *favela*'s violence: its animalistic, generational qualities. In the society of the City of God, the young and strong displace the old(er) and weak(er). This is presented as an accepted way of life. One of the Runts, a prepubescent gang, complains about the natural order of the system: "…you have to wait for some older guy to croak before you can move up." The structure of the narrative mirrors this cycle of life; the Tender Trio of the 1960s are the subjects of the first segments; each is replaced by an analogous member of the next generation. The audience knows, for example, that Benny and Angelica will not escape to their farm as planned, because it has already seen their story unfold through the narrative of Shaggy and Bernice.

Violence defines manhood and initiates the young boys into adult life. As one of the Runts says, "I smoke, I snort. I've killed and robbed. I'm a man." (Later, this Runt is shot and killed himself.) One of the most emotionally compelling scenes in the film involves the ritualistic initiation of Steak'n'Fries, a Runt, into L'il Ze's gang. The boy is told to choose where two other children (not much more than toddlers) will be shot, in the hand or in the foot. Steak'n'Fries chooses the hand; the gunman disregards his decision and shoots each boy in the foot. Next, Steak'n'Fries is told to choose and kill one of the two children. His hesitation and distraught expression are at odds with the manner in which violent perpetrators are shown in the rest of the film: clearly, this killer is taking no pleasure in the act. Steak'n'Fries chooses to spare, incidentally, the child that shows no discernable emotion, and kills the one who sobs like a baby: this is only one example of the way in which the narrative punishes sentiment and implicitly advocates an emotional distance. The shooting of the children's feet is the only instance of graphic, causally linked gun violence in the film; the viewer actually sees the bullet, in close-up, enter the flesh. When Steak'n'Fries takes the gun, on the other hand, the shot is

filmed from over his shoulder, as an observer present might see it. The audience does not see the shooting, only the falling body. At the critical moment of the boy's transformation into killer and man, the spectator is deprived both of the spectacle of the body and the spectacle of the killer. The body is shown, poorly focused, in a long take as Steak'n'Fries is told "Now, you're one of us."

The uncertainty the film expresses towards the justification of violence is most profound in its treatment of L'il Ze. While a variety of instrumental motives are offered for the violence done by others, L'il Ze seems unique in his pure enjoyment of violence. A simple reading might suggest that L'il Ze uses violence to attain power and money (he is made rich by his first major act) or out of self-preservation (the elimination of his enemies), but Meirelles seems to be suggesting something more excessive. The child L'il Ze (then known as L'il Dice) accompanies the Tender Trio in a robbery, but escalates the violence into a slaughter; he does so not as an act of initiation (at first, the Trio doesn't even know he has done it, nor does the audience) but because he wants to. L'il Ze's renaming ceremony, in which he receives an amulet from an Umbanda priest, casts his violence as both primal and transcendent. L'il Ze is coded as "evil" in a way others are not; no socio-economic or developmental forces can account for the extremity and irrationality of his actions.

The film shifts between stories and perspectives; while Rocket narrates and orders the events of the film, the camera is not fixed in its orientation. At times, the camera will adopt the perspectives of other characters, or, more commonly, that of a distanced observer. The adoption of L'il Ze's perspective, at Benny's farewell party, is interesting in that it actually encourages a more sympathetic view of L'il Ze as "human", casting doubt on the mythological status the film has created around him. Perhaps, after all, he is not evil as we have been led to believe, but simply a youth driven by feelings of loneliness and exclusion. It is a problem that Meirelles never fully resolves. The violence that leads directly to Benny's murder is sparked by L'il Ze's 'human' emotions: a sense of betrayal at Benny's departure, fear of being alone, his own failure to attract a woman. The battle with Ned is explained in these terms by Rocket: "The problem was simple: L'il Ze was ugly, Ned was handsome."

These attempts at providing psychological explanations for L'il Ze's actions - coming more than halfway through the film - introduce a level of ambiguity. The viewer may want to accept these explanations, which seem to offer a framework for making sense of otherwise inexplicable horrors. On the other hand, these explanations remain unconvincing given the earlier characterization of L'il Ze and the nihilism of the film as a whole. This ambiguity not only provokes confusion about the nature of violence, it also points to the constructed nature of narrative, reminding the viewer that s/he is watching one version of events. The same events, had they been narrated by L'il Ze rather than by Rocket, would compose an entirely different story. The use of voice-over narration and an episodic narrative structure, rather than encouraging the viewer to simply accept Rocket's perspective, is used to raise questions about the viewer's own relationship to the violence onscreen.

Complicity and silence surround the violence of the *favela*. The residents protect their own, though this seems due less to any loyalty than to a fear of repercussion. After the Tender Trio's brothel robbery, they are protected from the police first by the bar patrons who witness their escape and later by the entire community. Police raid begin, and Rocket claims that "Every day someone got beaten, someone was nailed. But no one talked." This silence also extends to the viewer, whose own complicity in the violence parallels that onscreen. Like the intimidated residents of the City of God, the viewer watches, and participates in the violence by watching, but does not intercede. The photographs Rocket provides to the newspaper are images of spectacle framed for those who are too afraid to experience the violence firsthand. Our own pleasure in framed images of violence is made suspect. The audience is reminded not only of the transgressive power of looking, but also of its complicity in creating the conditions of violence. In her book Disappearing Acts, Diana Taylor discusses the role of the spectator in another militarized Latin American nation, Argentina. Taylor discusses the notion of 'percepticide' and how violent spectacle can make "people pull back in fear, denial, and tacit complicity from the show of force. Therein lay its power." (Taylor, 123) Taylor also explains how being compelled to watch violence, while unable to prevent it, disempowers the viewer. Any sense that the viewer has control over the narrative of *City of God* is undermined by the film's reversals and restrictions; rather than godlike omniscience, the film engenders uncertainty, helplessness and complicity.

Alternatives to Violence

The film offers little comfort to viewers uncomfortable with their own complicity in the on-screen violence, or those seeking a 'ray of hope' in the narrative. Meirelles introduces alternatives to violence, only to then dismiss or disempower those alternatives. *City of God* breaks with audience expectations by presenting no viable moral choice. The allegory of the chicken's dilemma - "if you run away they get you and if you stay they get you too" - illustrates the film's fatalism, a fatalism that is not only ascribed to Rocket, but impressed upon the viewer throughout the film. The illusion of escape through sports, education, work, religion or even art is destroyed.

One of the earliest scenes in the film shows the boys playing football. As reviewer Kristian Lin points out, football has frequently represented a 'way out' for poor Brazilians. It is a huge part of both national identity and popular global image and the myth of the 'discovered' athlete is evoked by this sequence of the film. (Lin, 1) That myth is quickly discarded, however. One of the Tender Trio shoots the ball, ending the game and visually eliminating, with the freeze frame of the punctured ball, the dream of escape through athletic success. A similar myth holds that education can provide alternatives to violence. Throughout the film, in

fact, the boys are told (most often by their victims) to stop committing crimes and study. The story of Knockout Ned at first appears to be a moral tale on the power of education, but the tale unfolds very differently. Ned got an education, did military service, and holds a job. Yet he is not only unable to avoid being victimized, he ends up embracing violence as the chief rival to L'il Ze.

The story of the Tender Trio, the first episode of the film, can be read as a fatalistic commentary on the options for young men in the *favela*. The tale ends with the boys splitting up and choosing different paths. Goose chooses to go to work, taking a fishmonger job with his father. Hard work, though, is not the answer here either. Selling fish leads him to an affair which ultimately results in the woman's murder and Goose's own death at the hands of L'il Dice (later L'il Ze). Rocket himself concludes that "work is for suckers" when his own attempts at employment are thwarted by the ongoing violence of the gangs. Workers are presented as little more than targets in *City of God*; not only "suckers", but unlikely to survive, and the workplace is the constant target - both intentional and accidental - of robbery and gunfire. Ned refuses to give a gun to one youth who wishes to join the gang, saying that he is a worker and "won't last a week". The suggestion is that work will not protect one from violence, but expose one to victimization.

The second of the Trio, Shaggy, attempts a more literal form of escape. Shaggy, and later Benny, plan on dropping out of society to live on a farm, sleep with their girlfriends, and smoke dope. As Angelica says to Benny, "this violence sucks." Both Shaggy and Benny are killed on the verge of escaping, Shaggy by police and Benny by one of his own gang associates.

The final member of the Trio, Clipper, turns to religion after he has a bizarre vision. Reciting a prayer, Clipper walks right past the police who are looking for him; they immediately pursue and kill an innocent bystander instead. After this conversion and brush with the law, Clipper simply vanishes - whether disappearing from the narrative is the ultimate escape or the ultimate death is difficult to say. The vision itself is an idiosyncrasy, a single unexplained moment of surrealism in a film otherwise rooted in reality and hyper reality. There is some support for the notion of religion as an alternative to violence, although the film's failure to follow up on Clipper's story undermines this support. Too, there is another, darker and violent, aspect to religion. L'il Ze is a follower of Umbanda and his power and life-force are linked to an amulet. When L'il Ze ignores the advice of the Umbanda priest (raping a woman while wearing the amulet), he is killed, just as the priest warned. Carrot and Ned also call upon God to assist them - "There's a war on, let's start with a prayer" - and wear amulets (crucifixes) of their own. Over a montage of gunfire and weaponry, the gang recites the 'Our Father'. Religion is not, in these cases, an escape from but an aid to violence.

An optimistic viewer might assume that art will provide an alternative, that Rocket's photography will be his ticket out. To some extent this is true, as Rocket attains a job at the newspaper and so is able to leave the *favela* each day (although even at the newspaper, his only interaction at first is with another exile from the City of God.) After his photos are accidentally placed in the newspaper, Rocket is accepted by others at the newspaper, and even has his first sexual experience with a journalist there. The newspaper is thrilled with Rocket's photographs, which bring the spectacle of the *favela* into the lives of other Brazilians. The cost of this (partial and problematic) 'arrival', however, is that Rocket now feels he cannot return to the City of God. Rocket assumes that his photographs are a death sentence, but in fact the gangsters are willing participants in the spectacle. L'il Ze recognizes the power of the media in creating his image as "Boss", and demands more photographs. Each side of the equation exploits the other, while Rocket, the maker and seller of images, exploits both. Ironically, though, Rocket's success comes from returning to the City of God. His ability to produce and frame its images for outsiders means that Rocket is dependent upon violence for his livelihood.

Controlling the Violence

Some critics of *City of God* have found fault with its approach to violence, particularly with the lack of empathy it generates for its characters and victims. Joanne Laurier, for instance, complains that the film treats its subjects with "too much detachment…the characters are for the most part seen as though from a distance…the all-dominating violence is all too passively presented…as a result, the film fails to generate much sympathy for its victims - not a minor weakness." (Laurier) This distance is not only an emotional affect, as Laurier observes, but a critical visual strategy. The use of long shots and off-screen space prevents the audience from seeing much of the violence, and deprives the viewer of the catharsis that may be produced by seeing a violent act carried to its conclusion. Much of the bodily violence in the film is implied. In an interview, Meirelles says that this was a conscious choice: "Every time I had an opportunity to show violence I tried to avoid showing it..." (Gonzalez) The effect can be equated to Brechtian distanciation; rather than empathizing, the audience is asked to evaluate. Rather than trying to show the audience the reality, the audience is asked to imagine it. To further problematize viewer response, events are frequently presented from an opposing or uncertain point of view. The rape of Ned's girlfriend, for instance, is filmed not from Ned's perspective but from that of a bystander or observer looking over his shoulder. This positions the viewer not to identify with the subject, but outside the subject.

A typical sequence that employs the use of off-screen space to distance and unsettle the viewer is Shorty's murder of his wife. A long shot frames a view through the bedroom doorway; Shorty wields a shovel and attacks his wife, but the composition excludes the woman and the viewer must imagine the contact of the shovel to her body. In the next scene, the shot composition is the same, but now Shorty is seen digging; the hole (or grave) is still excluded from the composition. A similar technique is used in the sequence that reveals L'il Dice's murders at the motel. The audience has already seen the victims in an

earlier sequence (discussed below); now, they are not shown. Instead, the viewer sees only L'il Dice, his weapon, and his expression of ecstasy.

This strategy creates an unsettling effect. The viewer is constructed as not only complicit, but morally suspect, simultaneously wanting to see more and responding less. If the photographer of the images is committing an act of violence, so is the audience that looks at and demands those images.

In fact, bodies, the site of so much violence in *City of God*, are not dwelt upon. Throughout most of the film, they are treated with alternating casualness and calculation. The audience sees bodies falling, or lying on the ground, but the editing is rapid and generally cuts immediately away. The audience doesn't see the blood or tearing of flesh that we assume must accompany events. There are three scenes, however, which significantly reverse this technique, presenting and dwelling upon stylized tableaux of disfigured bodies. The first of these is the original scene of the motel massacre. The scene is silent as the camera slowly pans across rooms of bodies, arranged in stiff, unnatural positions; one woman hangs from a grill as though on a torture rack. In the second of these scenes, the montage that precedes the gang war, the bloody bodies of children slowly dissolve into other bodies, overlapped by distorted dialogue. In the final tableau, at the film's conclusion, the camera cuts from one dead gang member to another, close-ups showing the blood, brains and shattered bodies. This scene is also silent, slowing down and contrasting sharply with the chaotic and kinetic shootout that precedes it.

These reversals of tone, like the shifts from comedic to horrific, contribute to the violence of the film's form. Through its pervasiveness, violence in *City of God* becomes naturalized. Violence is not presented as a disruptive element in the social narrative but as a unifying motif that propels and connects the individual stories. Violence is the organizing principle of the film, which is full of interruptions, ruptures, and narrative reversals. This violence of form speaks to the film's tension between the hyper-real and the poetic, the postmodern and the radical. *City of God* possesses the markers of the postmodern film in its "disjointed narratives, rapid and chaotic camera, speedy flow of images, motifs of chaos… [and] dystopic scenarios". (Boggs, 361) But it also insists on being read as a (neo)neorealist and radical Brazilian text in the traditions of de Sica, Rocha and Brecht.

According to Baudrillard, the only means of resistance to the hyper-real is to refuse to resist, rather than claiming a subject position, "reflecting meaning without absorbing it". (Baudrillard, 85) *City of God* offers a subject position, that of the spectator who controls the gaze and the narrative, but challenges and erodes that position through violence, causing the spectator to question the nature of violence, image-making, and responsibility.

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Bloody Sunday: Classically Unified Trauma?

Renée Penney

The construction of cinematic Ireland has been influenced by numerous historical schisms, perhaps most notably the dominant ideology of cultural nationalism in Ireland, combined with the 'cinematic occupation' of Ireland by Britain and the United States. An indigenous film community emerged in Ireland in the 1970s intent on re-coding the landscape by overriding the derogatory stereotypes of the pastoral and the atavistic. This move towards 'authentic representation' spans across social, cinematic and critical spheres and can be associated with the drive towards a collective working through of Irish conflict. Early filmic representations shunned the formal aesthetics of Hollywood and strived for a text that would shift the mythical ideology of Ireland. Thus, cinema became a cultural and political weapon. However, as the global economy expanded and co-production agreements dominated the film industry, Irish cinema became divided on its role on the international stage. Irish 'radical' text now conflicted with the Hollywood drive towards universality.

Bloody Sunday (Paul Greengrass 2002) rests precariously within this contextual framework as both a representation of Irish history and an intertextual critique of the history of Irish representation. The film recounts the 24 hours surrounding the 1972 massacre of civilians in Derry, Northern Ireland by British Armed Forces. What interests me is the way that 24 hours is reconstructed in this film. Greengrass presents two conflicting viewing positions within the Irish and British representations. He also makes two key stylistic choices in his reenactment of Bloody Sunday: observational documentary style, applied to the fictional realm of history and emphasized by handheld camera and rigorous rhythmic editing; and reflexive narration, used to invoke commentary on historical and representational intertextuality. In addition, Greengrass chooses an extremely balanced formal structure that cues the viewer to an overarching Classical influence. The central question that emerges is how this confluence of elements impacts the ideological message of the film.

It is useful to incorporate a stylistic analysis to locate these streams. The film opens with parallel media conferences that establish the primary polemics of the film: the Irish Nationalists versus the British, and concurrently the theme of peace versus war. Over the course of the film, these polemics splinter into four locations - the Civil Rights march, the counter-march that escalates in violence, the British Army ground troops and Army headquarters. This splintering continues throughout the film emphasizing the perpetual divisions amongst alliances and enemies and illustrating the complexity of the history it is attempting to represent. The use of crosscutting further exemplifies these narrative/historical fractures and establishes a definitive cause and effect chain.

Overall, the film can be characterized as providing an obstructed point of view throughout, however there are distinctions. In the first half of the film, the viewer is frequently placed in observational distance from the Irish and as 'occupying' the British point of view. From the onset of meeting the main protagonist, Ivan Cooper, we are set in motion as his follower as he prepares for the Civil Rights march. He is the embodiment of the frenetic forward momentum of the film that is paralleled by rigorous rhythmic editing. As we are introduced to other Irish characters, we typically view them through doorframes, from hallways, from within crowds of anonymous bodies or in the distance down a barricaded Derry street. It is rare that we participate in the perceptual subjectivity of Irish characters, until the massacre when our viewing position shifts so that we occupy the collective body of the Irish. In contrast, British soldiers are typically photographed in mid to close-up range in a tight huddle within a fortified setting. These scenes are often edited in a component style, thereby omitting the spatial orientation of establishing shots in order to emphasize circumstantial reactions of individuals. The viewer is often placed within the huddle, part of the tight circular formation, positioned in the same close proximity as the military personnel to one another. This visual compression of space and figures simultaneously connotes the limitations of character point of view, further accented by the soldiers' obstructed vision through viewing slots or front windshields of tanks, over the tops of walls, around corners. Perceptual subjectivity, albeit fractured, is used throughout the footage of the British soldiers. This lack of a complete picture on the part of the British is further enhanced by the blind viewing position found in Army headquarters, a position epitomized by the disembodied voices that deliver reports off-screen or via telephone and repeated in the schematic reconstruction of viewing positions indicated on the map.

Nick Browne's critical writing on spectator positions offers some incite into the reading of this film. Describing the various positions of the spectator he hones in on identification processes and notes the fictional position occupied within the action: "insofar as we see from what we might take to be the eye of a character, we are invited to occupy the place allied to the place he holds, in, for example, the social system… in another figurative sense of place, it is the only way that our response can be accounted for, that we can identify with a character's position in a certain situation." (111) The reflexive observational recording of the reenactment of the Bloody Sunday massacre is the full revelation of this idea. All previous viewing positions and distancing mechanisms are collapsed into one traumatized viewing position that is viscerally subjective. In this scene, the camera becomes the memory body, the instigator of a phantasmic primary witness position. The pandemonium induced by the hand-held camera that shakes out frames of fractured bodies and disorienting movement provides the most jarring emotional response in the film. Bill Nichols describes observational cinema as conveying "the sense of

unmediated and unfettered access to the world…we expect to have the ability to take the position of an ideal observer, moving among people and places to find revealing views." (43) In this scene the viewer is cast into the subjective field of vision of the British that induces a dialectic response: the viewer simultaneously occupies the 'Irish space' and witnesses the 'British affect'.

The historical intertextuality of the film favours a contextualized reading of the event across history. The Civil Rights march itself can be identified as signifying a procession through history. The march proceeds down the hill out of the rural landscape and into the urban city of Derry. The march is largely shot from the front of the parade, from the point of view of the lorry looking back at the marchers. The IRA provos along with the Irish youth are positioned at the rear of the march and are therefore photographed from the opposite direction, from the back of the parade looking forward, until they splinter off into the counter-march. This visual opposition heightens the narrative tension and epitomizes the conflict of war/peace within strategies of resolution. It also harkens back to a conventional representation of youth in Irish cinema, characterized as future motivated but weighed down by the burden of history - youth are viewed as inheriting all the conflicts of their forefathers.

This historical intertextuality is an overdetermined element and Greengrass walks the fine line of parody in conjuring up conventional stereotypes and traditions of cultural nationalism: Ivan Cooper still lives at home with his aging parents; the Catholic Church is signified by the presence of the priest who counsels young Gerald at the march; the 'new' position of women in Irish history is invoked in the comment that the march is for 'women and children' and further emphasized by the presence of the character Bernadette Devlin, a key feminist MP in the 1970s. The 'Irish and their drink' are cited in conversation while the 'brawling' Irish appear around every corner as Ivan hands out pamphlets for the peace march. While attention is drawn to these representational traces, they are fleeting. Once acknowledged they are quickly discarded. This purging of Irish stereotypes may be a tip of the hat to the past as Irish cinema reformulates Irish tropes for the future, but it also plays into the paradigm of Classical unity that seeks to discard extraneous details that detract from the narrative flow. One must ask whether *Bloody Sunday* as a filmic text is being reduced to a generic drama for universal appeal.

David Bordwell describes the canonic narration of classical Hollywood as presenting "psychologically defined individuals who struggle to solve a clear-cut problem or attain specific goals". The classical story ends with a decisive victory or defeat, a resolution of the problem and the principal causal agency is a character, in particular "a discriminated individual." (1985:157) Classical narrative is also marked by two narrative streams: the primary action motivated by a deadline or appointment, and the heterosexual romance. Bloody Sunday is no exception and includes the deadline of the march and the romance of Ivan Cooper and his lover Frances, paralleled by the young romance of Gerald and his girlfriend. Each romance is representative of the threat imposed by 'love across the sectarian divide' and is also used as a moment of pause, a formal reprieve from an accelerating and frenetic narrative. The Hollywood narration in *Bloody Sunday* may be the most problematic. Its absolutism and its drive towards resolution foisted upon an historical reenactment embodies all the problems of a 'totalizing history' that attempts to bring the event into full presence, full meaning. (LaCapra 103)

In order to examine this totalizing effect in *Bloody Sunday*, I have chosen to utilize Dominick LaCapra's mode of inquiry as described in his "History and Memory After Auschwitz." In this essay LaCapra analyses the documentary *Shoah* (Claude Lanzmann) through a series of questions that locate and interrogate the historian/filmmaker within a text in relation to the totalizing impulse of historical analysis, that is. LaCapra's principles of analysis are drawn from his acknowledgement that neither the historian, nor his/her critical tools, nor history itself is neutral and therefore must be questioned throughout a process of analysis. While I don't wish to compare these two texts, I believe LaCapra's mode of inquiry can be applied to *Bloody Sunday* to move from a surface reading to a deeper reading associated with identification processes.

Clearly, the reenactment of the event of *Bloody Sunday* itself is subject to the powerful denotative value of cinema in its ability to reproduce reality to the point of believability. Our previous knowledge that the film event is based on historical reality further informs our engagement with the surface of the text. This relationship triggers a predetermined identification process, whereby the past is compressed into the moment as the event appears to be reincarnated on screen. Because of this cinematic affect, LaCapra emphasizes the need for the filmmaker to acknowledge that any account of knowledge is limited and more specifically he believes it is essential for the filmmaker to reveal this awareness rather than attempting to mask it as 'totalizing authenticity'. This tangible revelation can take the form of a disruption in the historian/filmmaker's own mode of inquiry and narration. I believe the reflexive narration of Bloody Sunday attempts to respond to this need.

One can argue that Greengrass strives to unhinge the totalizing potential of the filmic text through explicit intertextual references to the modes of recording, in particular the role of the media in the construction of meaning. The media are invoked throughout the narrative in literal constructions of press conferences that bookend the film, in character dialogue that cites the need for media presence and the desire to "win the propaganda war." In its observational form the film also conjures up eyewitness news formats. Add to this the fact that Greengrass himself had a career in investigative television journalism and docudrama with the BBC and it appears we have a conscientious form of disrupted narrative that inserts the filmmaker's awareness of the communicative nature of the media in general, and the event of *Bloody Sunday* in

particular. However, I'm not entirely convinced that Greengrass reveals the limitations of inquiry that LaCapra pinpoints, since the film's disruption exists comfortably within a unified form and the overall narrative is rendered into a definitive statement. Greengrass quite literally pits the ill-fated Northern Ireland Civil Rights march against the trigger-happy British Armed Forces in a landscape that is so historically and politically volatile that violence seems inevitable. It is difficult to read the narrative differently. Fundamentally, he sets out to create a heightened emotionalism in the viewer through the (re)construction of the primary witness position, in order to wage the charge of complicity - at the British and at the viewer. It would seem that Greengrass' intent, particularly in the scene of the massacre, is to induce feelings of trauma, helplessness and guilt, primarily for affect rather than for the purpose of creating new layers of inquiry, or casting doubt on the tools of representation themselves. Further inquiry is necessary here.

In his analysis of *Shoah*, LaCapra builds on notions of the limits of knowledge to the point of an absolute refusal for total understanding, or an acknowledgement of the incomprehensibility of the event due to the intervention of the forces of 'trauma' and 'performativity.' (109) It is conceivable to argue that a text like Bloody Sunday can propose a collective working through of trauma but it is simultaneously troubled by the very nature of trauma and reenactment as "entrapment in a fate that cannot be known, cannot be told, but can only be repeated". (Laub 69) Clinician Dori Laub identifies a key concept in trauma recovery that can be extended to the impact of filmic reenactment:

> [The] re-externalization of the event can occur and take effect only when one can articulate and transmit the story, literally transfer it to another outside oneself and then take it back again, inside. Telling thus entails a reassertion of the hegemony of reality and a re-externalization of the evil that affected and contaminated the trauma victim. (69)

In the case of *Bloody Sunday*, the primary and secondary witness positions are reconstructed and the viewer asked to bear witness to the trauma to become a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event. Although it is not the actual event, the use of observational eyewitness news format and the reconstruction of the mediated image of the event attempts to provoke a traumatic response in the viewer. However, as La Capra points out "Trauma is precisely the gap, the open wound, in the past that resists being entirely filled in, healed, or harmonized in the present." (109) This concept not only runs counter to notions of unified narrative closure, but the act of inducing trauma via the dramatic vehicle purely for emotional impact denies the complex processes of trauma recovery. In short, 'trauma' becomes a built in 'special affect' that the spectator brings with them in every viewing experience. The filmmaker can count on this trigger and is not required to engage in the corresponding procedures for recovery that a therapeutic situation would warrant. Therefore the absolute refusal of the idea of a total understanding can become an excuse for the induction of heightened emotionalism instead.

With this in mind, we can analyse the construction of the traumatic event and its aftermath in the film to determine whether a process of transformation occurs. The effect of the massacre and its aftermath are heightened through the devastating contrast of the fast-paced abstraction of the murders followed by the halting tableaus of the victims and their families. This shift in the rigorous momentum of the narrative achieves the heightened emotionalism it seeks. Intertwined with the structural and thematic representation of trauma is the iconic representation of 'family'. The family is a primary signifier within Irish cinema connected to the nation as a whole, its enemies, its relationship to past, present and future. The representation of the fractured family therefore connotes larger issues and is used as a major signifying device within Irish cinema. The culmination of family as ruptured nation is exemplified in the scene of the aftermath of the massacre in the hospital where the massive collective organism of the family appears disemboweled, strewn across the floor, heaped in sobbing masses, frozen in shocked stasis. Rather than discarding this iconic trope of family as he does with numerous other Irish conventions, Greengrass uses its Irish specificity and universal conventionality to maximum affect thereby transforming the "Irish problem" into an identifiable humanist condition. This generalization aids the transference of the traumatic event across a variety of positions within and without the text. However, once the traumatic wound is opened, it is prolonged through the closing memorial to the victims. Clearly no closure can occur within this particular story at this point in time, if ever. However, the viewer is also left without emotional closure - the only consolation the filmic text can offer is the possibility for violent retaliation which constitutes the continuation of the cycle of trauma. In an interesting aside, I am reminded of John Hill's comparison of representation of violence in American and British cinema. For Hill, violence in British cinema is largely positioned as an obstacle to be overcome, while American cinema utilizes violence as a tool to overcome obstacles. I believe the representation of violence in Irish cinema may combine these two concepts so that violence becomes both an obstacle to overcome and a tool to overcome it. This is certainly the paradoxical position we are left in at the end of the film.

Can we extend the concept of the disruptive force of trauma and performativity onto the critical engagement of Irish history and representation itself? Is it possible to say that the analysis of cinematic representation in Ireland is thwarted by an unconscious working through process that paradoxically seeks out a resolution to conflict where no resolution exists? Multiple layers of historic trauma combined with a cinema of reenactment of that trauma suggests the double bind of individual acting out/working through within the construction of knowledge and collective identity. Irish cinema and criticism is preoccupied with the notion of authentic representations, and Irish filmmakers are confronted with the lofty task of "getting it right", that is

of encoding Irish cinema with socially acceptable signification. But can an ideal cinematic image of Ireland be found amongst its political, historical, and cultural divisions, within the open wound in the past "that resists being entirely filled in, healed, or harmonized in the present?" Or at the very least, can we expect a single film to serve this purpose?

I believe the tension between the linear narrative structure and its lateral self-reflexivity across history is not enough to dislodge it from the dominant unifying structure of Hollywood Classicism. However, that unity serves a very specific function: it is precisely the Classical obsession with balance and a clear cause and effect ordering that instigates the major representational imbalance in the film - the construction of a good and evil polemic within an historical narrative. Combined with the fractured point of view and the visual unrest that is constructed throughout the film these seemingly conflicting narrational strategies instigate a dialectical response in the viewer. Furthermore, the film's constant splintering of character relations and viewing positions also implies the development of individual histories within a collective framework.

While a totalizing narrative is impossible, and *Bloody Sunday* may not shift the dominant ideology, I believe it does shift the stereotypes of Ireland by pointedly calling attention to the British engagement in Irish history, identity construction and violence and dislodging the notion that Britain is saving Ireland from itself. It also serves as a memorial to the victims of Bloody Sunday and transforms the 'strangeness' of the Irish problem into the familiar. Conversely, this unified form makes *Bloody Sunday* a marketable commodity in the U.S. given its genre conventions that embody biopic, melodrama, and action. ©

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Interview with Mina Shum: The Director's Question

Miya Davar

Mina Shum is exuberant, eloquent, and 5'3". Her presence extends far beyond the bounds of her stature, however. Born in Hong Kong and raised in Vancouver, often pigeonholed as the "Chinese-Canadian Woman film director," Shum makes films that are universal questions. Her three features *Double Happiness*, *Drive, She Said*, and *Long Life, Happiness, and Prosperity* are about windows into lives we might otherwise not see, the magic around us if we look for it, and a search for the way to live. Shum graced the UBC campus from 1983-1989, receiving a Theatre degree and a Diploma in Film Production. Her first film, *Double Happiness*, won international acclaim and several awards. We meet at the Laughing Bean on a sunlit afternoon and I receive a glimpse into the world of Shum...

Myia: You write, direct, produce, act, write and perform music, and you've created an art installation. Why do you choose film as your artistic expression?

Mina: I was 19 when I decided I wanted to get into film. I saw a film called *Gallipoli* by Peter Weir. It was centered around a friendship between two men, and I realized one, they all had funny accents, so you could make a film that wasn't American-centric you could actually find an audience and two, you could marry beautiful visuals with a very intimate story. It just never occurred to me, because I thought I was going to be a theatre director. I just went eureka! (...) In the last 3 years of my Theatre degree I tried to get into the film program and I kept getting rejected (laughs). But I was a punker in the late eighties and a woman and I didn't and still don't want to change who I am. I want the industry to change. So I just kept going back. (In) my first application to the UBC film program I cut out ransom letters like out of magazines: LET ME IN YOUR FILM PROGRAM. I thought I was being creative and they thought I was kind of dangerous. (laughs) And even when I was in film school my projects never got voted to be made. But I made them anyway, and then I came out of UBC with a grant from the Canada Council just because I just did it. That was 15 years ago and I still think that chutzpah is what gets me through the day now. That kind of, "I know you're fantasizing about this crazy movie that no one will ever allow you do if you ask permission, so just do it, don't ask permission."

Myia: So for you film can marry all of these things?

Mina: Yeah, music, sound design and storytelling. I like the idea of being transported. When I go to a movie, I'm taken on vacation, either emotionally or literally. There's not too many art forms that can do that so inclusively, that speak to everybody. The language of cinema, narrative, tends to speak to almost everybody, and is so all-encompassing. (...) It just is funny, I didn't know I was going to be a director. When I look back, it feels like I was training for it my whole life.

Myia: Do you try to put forth an agenda of multiculturalism, feminism, and immigrant identity, or are these more organic results?

Mina: I think every film is a question, a question I'm having about how to live my life, and you're also revealing something . Especially since I write comedies and comedies are rooted in tragedy. (...) When you're pushing those buttons with yourself as a creator, you're pushing those buttons for the audience. So (these questions and answers) may be called feminism or multiculturalism, but to me it's all about HOW DO WE LIVE? In a world that's changing constantly, I'm always trying to figure out a way to entertain and enlighten, and that's for myself as well. (...) Because I'm a living breathing human being in Vancouver, which is a very multicultural city, and I'm a woman, I tend to get tagged as someone who might write about "issues." But that's not where it starts for me, it starts on a very human level. I use narrative to reveal things that people don't see. I'm hoping to show that normal is a variable thing. For me, how to achieve happiness and what is defined as normal are parallel questions.

Myia: *Double Happiness* and *Long Life, Happiness, and Prosperity* centre around Chinese-Canadian families, and the films also seem to be navigating the hyphen between Chinese and Canadian. To you, how is personal identity defined by physical appearance and family expectations?

Mina: I think (finding identity) is a universal struggle. (...) So much of my personal identity according to others has to do with the way I look. I think I'm always trying to thwart people's perceptions of me for that reason. I've had people phone my agent and say, "Oh, Mina Shum. She doesn't speak English, does she?" And it's like, "have you really looked at my movies? Because most of them are in English." (...) I think family ultimately has a grave effect on your personal identity. They're your first mirror. (...) They're your first sense of safety and home, so depending on how

functional they are, you bring those preconceptions into how you relate with other people. (...) I think that physical presence is that way people deal with you but I think your family is the way you relate to the world.

Myia: What do you want to show about Vancouver in your work?

Mina: I think it's beautiful (laughs). I think it's a very poetic city. I shoot a lot on the industrial waterfront here because on a very simple graphic level, it is humanity contextualized. We are so small and the world is so big and yet we try. So I love setting things in this city. I also love that this city is so open compared to a lot of places. It's almost like, we don't mind if you're a freak, we like that, so I always want to show the diversity that's here.

Myia: *Double Happiness* seems to be more self-reflexive, whereas *Drive, She Said* and *Long Life, Happiness, and Prosperity* are more conventional narrative. Why did you choose the narrative form that you did for *Double Happiness*?

Mina: I realized I was making one of the first works. It's a very small story, a Chinese girl trying to decide if she wants to move out. I realized I needed to let the characters confront the audience directly, so that there were no bones about what her (Jade's) voice was. There was no "us" filling in the blanks in terms of who they are, and I wanted to show a very strong woman. So she's talking to the camera directly, and even the father and mother and sister do that later. It shows a certain strength that Chinese people aren't known for. The cliché is that we're quiet, so I wanted to kind of break that by choosing a self-reflexive form. Mind you, now there's all these shows on tv and that's all they do now, so it's not even interesting anymore. (laughs)

Myia: How autobiographical was "Double Happiness," or was it at all?

Mina: I called it semi-autobiographical, more truth than fact. What I wanted to do was make a movie for me when I moved out because there was nobody telling me it was okay. I wanted to reach out to that girl who was 18 and so scared. (...) In fact, many kids moved out because of my damn movie! (laughs). (…) Someone just asked me yesterday, "are families as traditional now?" It's like, well maybe not quite as traditional as that story was, it was exaggerated for cinema, but there's still stuff to be mined out of that restrictive (relationship).

Myia: The scene with Jade running through the empty industrial space was really powerful in drawing in the viewer to her trapped state. How did you decide on the combination of music, action, etc.?

Mina: When I was shooting the movie, both producers sat me down, Steve Hedges was a UBC grad, and said, "where do you see the third act climax?" I said, "Well, she runs." And on the script it's like, "She Runs". (laughs) That's all, it's not described any deeper than that, because if I did my job as a director and as a storyteller, the pressure cooker is so tight at that point that she has no choice but to run... the physical action showed how trapped she was. And the music we ended up with, the Sonic Youth song in the movie, was what we played when she ran. I played Sandra three Sonic Youth songs and I said, "Which one motivates you most?" And she picked one and I said, "okay, that's it."

Myia: In *Drive, She Said*, the characters of Sloan and Chen seemed to be playing with a lot like gender, ethnicity, and stereotypes. What is the scene in which we are introduced to them about?

Mina: (...) I wanted to give the characters of Nadine and Tass a place where they could shed their own baggage. So Sloan and Chen had to be so completely without baggage and self-reflexive that they could role-play, and we still don't know by the end of the movie which one's the male and which one's the female, I hope. We go to the Chinese-Canadian restaurant and we have certain assumptions. It's kind of nice that they're (Sloan and Chen) kind of weird and kinky and we're not quite sure what's going to happen next. Because of that it loosens Tass and Nadine up to be able to actually admit that they like each other. So I was trying to create a fantastical, surreal haven for the two leads.

Myia: Your films seem to have an overall sense of whimsy. By incorporating the use of magic by a child, how does this add to the exploration of themes in the *Long Life, Happiness, and Prosperity*?

Mina: The film was about how does one keep faith in a difficult world? I wanted to instill in people a sense of hope. If you can believe, then there's hope. It's as simple as that. If the film was about keeping faith in a difficult world, then Mindy being a kid, most people don't believe kids when they do anything. She was the perfect catalyst to try these charms and as an audience member you're not sure if they worked or not. And it's her belief ultimately that saves her at the end. Kin (Sandra Oh's character) believing in her daughter was redemption. I was exploring ideas of faith, partly because I got into researching Chinese religion (...) and so I wanted to kind of instill the story with that. (...) (Chinese religions) leave room for your own personality and interpretation within a religion, so I kind of wanted to explore that just for myself. (The film is) a hodgepodge of everything really, so now what do I believe in? EVERYTHING. (laughs). I think it's better than believing in nothing, so...

Myia: What is feminism for you?

Mina: I have these simple rules for my own life. I've had questions constantly peering their heads, and the answers are always evolving. For me, feminism is: I can do anything that anyone else can do. And that's cross-gender, cross-

race, cross-height. (laughs) It's funny because one of my mentors in life, she's always saying to me, "You have such a sense of entitlement." And it's amazing because I came up from this very working-class, non-privileged minority family and she goes "Where did you get it from?" And I just go well "If you just think you can do it, you can do it." And I think that's what feminism is. If you can own that attitude, then you're free. You don't have to keep checking in with feminist doctrine, you just do it, you are entitled. (...) If you can just build the confidence to do that, that will make a very big dent in the next generation.

Myia: What projects are you working on right now?

Mina: I'm working on my great fantasy project! I'm working with Steve Hedges who I worked with on *Double Happiness*, who was a year ahead of me at UBC. (...) I think we are in a climate of not promoting the original story now, we want to take books or video games or newspaper articles and make movies from them, we don't want to take a chance on a fresh new idea. So I'm really excited that I have a fresh new idea that people actually seem interested in. It's called *The Immortal Immigrants*. It's about a family of Chinese fighting immortal immigrants who have been alive for 600 years and now they're hiding out in Vancouver present-day running a Chinese restaurant. And the 21 year old Ling who's immortal is tired of living with her family and tired of being immortal and wants her own life, and yet at the same time they're hiding from an arch-nemesis the whole time and they're dealing with racism and society's expectations and they're trying to fit into the Chinese community and she just wants to date a mortal. She thinks the skateboard guy is really cute. (laughs) (...) This is about trying to find a definition of family and home and trusting. (...) I think it's a really timely movie.

Myia: How has your experience been as a working filmmaker in BC?

Mina: I feel very lucky that there is work here, but at the same time it's pulling away. The Hollywood industry is becoming very protective of its business so a lot of productions are staying in LA, so we'll see how long it lasts. (...) As a filmmaker I'm concerned because there was a real trend towards basically grabbing American movie stars and putting them in Canadian movies and only making movies that had a video game attached or a book that already had sold a million copies. Where would the fresh film come from if there are those restrictions? There's other stories out there that haven't been told yet by young filmmakers who are still finding their voice. Without Canadian filmmakers who are risking their pain to tell us their story, we're not being truly reflective to ourselves, we're only watching American things reflecting us. To really create an identity, it has to be us telling our particular stories in our particular ways.