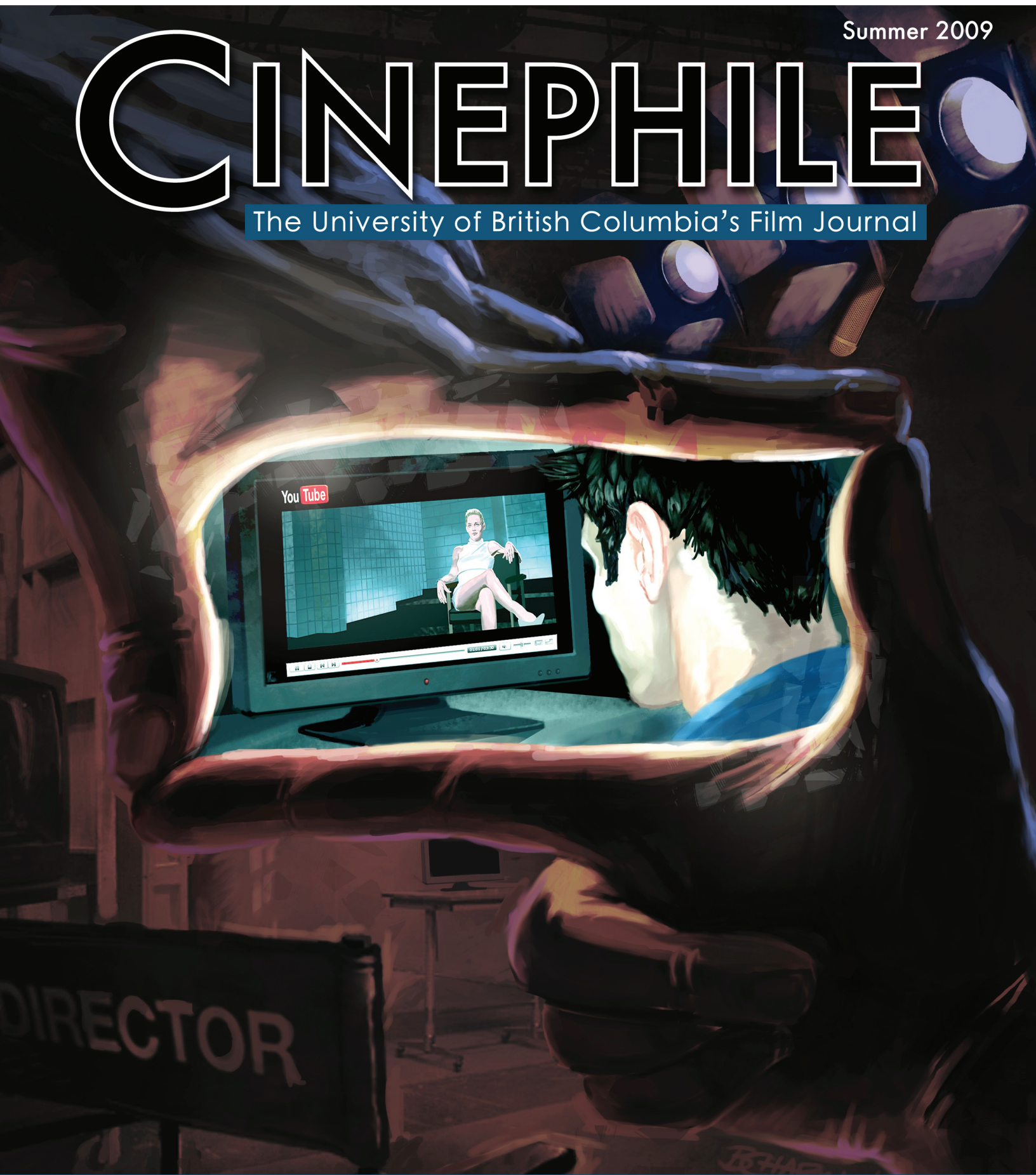


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CINEPHILE

The University of British Columbia's Film Journal



Brenda Austin-Smith on *Alice in the Cities* Murray Pomerance on *Torn Curtain*

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Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Foreword: What a Scene Can Do Elena del Río | 4 |
| <i>Alice in the Cities</i> : The Uses of Disorientation Brenda Austin-Smith | 6 |
| Snuff Boxing: Revisiting the <i>Snuff</i> Coda Alexandra Heller-Nicholas | 10 |
| That 70s Sequence: Remembering the Bad Old Days in <i>Summer of Sam</i> R. Colin Tait | 17 |
| Television, Live Transmission: <i>Control</i> and the Televised Performance Scene Brian Fauteux | 24 |
| The Spies Who Came in from the Cold: Framing Alfred Hitchcock's <i>Torn Curtain</i> Murray Pomerance | 30 |
| In the Bathhouse: Collective Violence and <i>Eastern Promises</i> Jessica Hughes | 35 |
| That There Corpse Is Startin' to Turn! <i>Three Burials</i> and the Post-Mortem Western Brent Strang | 39 |
| Hitch-cockeyed: Ocular Dys/function in Alfred Hitchcock's <i>Rear Window</i> Larrie Dudenhoefter | 47 |
| Gaze, Suture, Interface: The Suicide Scene in Michael Haneke's <i>Caché</i> Seung-hoon Jeong | 54 |
| The New Scene Canon | 60 |

Editor's Note

There are certain scenes which have the power to enthrall, provoke, and delight—our cover captures one such titillating tableau. But what gives such a scene the ability to stand apart, to take on a life of its own? What is it about Robert De Niro's "Are you talking to me?" scene that has such lasting cultural resonance? How does Gene Kelly dancing in the rain embody an entire ethos of escapism?

A scene sets up a world, a distinct time and place that draws us in and holds us captive. Not only does the scene invite us to engage with its reality (or unreality), but also to navigate its many ontological avenues for meaning. Some scenes clearly mark their boundaries, while others lose their definition and acquiesce to narrative momentum, effacing their beginning, middle, and end in favour of one or two privileged moments. A scene may be isolated as a synecdoche for a whole film, genre, director's oeuvre, or national cinema. So, too, is our appreciation of certain films, directors, and performers frequently remembered as a repertoire of key scenes; just as there is cult film, there is a cult of the scene. Viral videos and homespun video mash-ups (each with a profusion of hits, comments, and links to related material) are perhaps the greatest testament to the scene's power to continually inspire reflection and creative interaction.

In addition to being one of the primary sites of fandom, the scene is also one of the first points of entry for scholarly analysis. A sequence analysis is one of the key skills a film student learns before turning to more rigorous and rhetoric-based argumentation, but this 'amateur' exercise also proves useful for approaching contemporary viewing practices. Portable media devices, YouTube, DVD/Blu-ray scene selection, downloadable movies and trailers have all reframed our viewing habits. In this changing climate of spectatorship and cinephilia, scene studies offer an opportunity to reconcile cinephilic appreciation within film scholarship.

In keeping with this evolving viewing culture, we have conceived this issue as an interactive experience: on our newly redesigned website—cinephile.ca—each article is accompanied by an embedded video clip of the scene, and a comments forum for discussion. You will also find a short film created by Elena del Rio (and co-director Miriam Cooley) which, like her Foreword, delves into the scene's affective potential to resonate profoundly and communicate viscerally.

Kicking off this issue, Brenda Austin Smith highlights just such a scene in *Alice in the Cities*—an example of what she calls 'vertiginous cinema'—that both captivates and dislocates us emotionally and physically in a way we cannot fully explain. Conceptualizing how the scene can function as the thematic or ideological kernel of a film or cycle of films, Murray Pomerance illuminates the fire motif of two framing scenes in *Torn Curtain* and Brent Strang posits the 'Cantina Scene' in *Three Burials* as representative of the Post-Mortem Western.

Contemplating the scene's reliance on music video logic, Brian Fauteaux underscores the iconic significance of the televised performance scene in *Control*, while R. Colin Tait shows how 'That 70s Sequence' in *Summer of Sam* partakes of an overarching trend within the genealogy of the musical montage. Revisiting the *Snuff* coda, Alexandra Heller-Nicholas uncovers a largely unseen element of the controversial scene—one that destabilizes the swarm of early feminist and moralist criticism surrounding the film's depiction of 'real' murder. Tackling another scene infamous for its violent, explicit content, Jessica Hughes examines the 'naked fight scene' in *Eastern Promises*. Lastly, two articles consider the surveillant gaze through a Lacanian lens: Larrie Dudenhoefter likens the visual regime in *Rear Window* to ocular strabismus and Seung-hoon Jeong decodes the role of video interface in *Caché*'s suicide scene.

Engaging with alternate forms of spectatorship and exploiting new, interdisciplinary perspectives, this collection of articles is aptly suited to the journal's mandate of widening the scope of the film studies discipline. Affirming its position as the preeminent Canadian graduate journal in film studies, *Cinephile* focuses on research attuned to the dissolution of boundaries (film/cultural studies, film/video, high/low art, etc.) and encourages articles that deploy film theory with a clever balance of novelty and irreverence. For making this issue possible, we must graciously acknowledge our advisor Ernest Mathijs, our administrators, Gerald Vanderwoude and Jennifer Suratos, art director Bobby Mathieson, and cover illustrator Barret Chapman, our editorial board, and of course, UBC's Department of Theatre and Film.

If our cover hasn't already seduced you to become a subscriber, our original content—designed to satisfy all your cinephilic appetites—surely will!

-Colleen Montgomery and Brent Strang

Contributors

Brenda Austin-Smith is an Associate Professor in the Department of English, Film and Theatre at the University of Manitoba. She is co-editor, with George Melnyk, of the forthcoming collection *The Gendered Screen: Canadian Women Filmmakers*. She writes about film adaptation, Henry James and Alfred Hitchcock, Canadian film, and women who weep at classic Hollywood melodrama.

Elena del Río is Associate Professor of Film Studies at the University of Alberta. She is the author of *Deleuze and the Cinemas of Performance: Powers of Affection* (2008). Her essays on the intersections of cinema and the body in the areas of technology, affect, and performance have appeared in such journals as *Camera Obscura*, *CJFS*, *Deleuze Studies*, *Discourse*, *Studies in French Cinema*, and *SubStance*.

Larrie Dudenhoefter is an Assistant Professor of English at Kennesaw State University and a doctoral candidate in Critical Theory, Film Studies, and Classical Rhetorics at Georgia State University. He is the author of “Monster Mishmash: Icon and Intertext in Tobe Hooper’s *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*” in the latest issue of the *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*.

Brian Fauteux is a Ph.D. student in Communications at Concordia University, whose current research explores the ‘alternativeness’ of Canadian campus radio programming, independent music production and distribution, and the intersection of popular music and cinema. Upcoming research will look at Canadian campus radio history and its relationship to Canadian music scenes.

Alexandra Heller-Nicholas is a Ph.D. candidate in the School of Communication, Arts and Critical Enquiry at La Trobe University in Melbourne, Australia. She is currently writing her thesis on microhistory and paracinematic horror. She publishes frequently in *Metro* magazine, with forthcoming work to appear in *Trash Cinema* and *Limina*.

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Colleen Montgomery is an M.A. candidate in Film Studies at The University of British Columbia, completing her thesis “Pixar-ticulation: The Voice in Contemporary Animation.” Her essay “Post-Soviet Freakonomics” appeared in *Cinephile* 5.1. Her research interests include animation and translation studies. Forthcoming work will appear in *Paradoxa* 22.

Murray Pomerance is Professor in the Department of Sociology at Ryerson University and the author of *The Horse Who Drank the Sky: Film Experience Beyond Narrative and Theory*, *Johnny Depp Starts Here*, *An Eye for Hitchcock*, and much other work. He edits the “Techniques of the Moving Image” series for Rutgers University Press.

Brent Strang is an M.A. candidate in Film Studies at the University of British Columbia, completing his thesis, “The Post-Mortem Western: Revisioning Masculinity, Violence and the Frontier Myth since 1990.” He presented “Cinema of Cruelty in the Films of Jan Švankmajer” at the 2008 FSAC Colloquium and published “Beyond Genre and Logos” in *Cinephile* 4.1.

R. Colin Tait is a Ph.D. student in Media Studies at The University of Texas at Austin. Recent publications include “Politics, Class and Allegory in Spike Lee’s *Inside Man*” (*The Spike Lee Reader*) and “Piercing Steven Soderbergh’s *Bubble*” (*The Business of Entertainment*). Currently, he is co-authoring *The Cinema of Steven Soderbergh*.

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Foreword

What a Scene Can Do

Elena del Río

Every image is indistinguishable from its actions and reactions... Every image is... 'a road by which pass, in every direction, the modifications propagated throughout the immensity of the universe'. Every image acts on others and reacts to others, on 'all their facets at once' and 'by all their elements'.

-Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*

Inspired by Spinoza, Deleuze's question on the body does not address a presupposed essence, but rather a series of potentialities that are actualized in becoming, forces that are formed in the body's encounters with other bodies. For both Spinoza and Deleuze, the most pressing question is 'what can a body do?': "We know nothing about a body until we know what it can do [...] what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition [...] with the affects of another body [...] either to exchange actions and passions with it or to join it in composing a more powerful body" (Deleuze and Guattari 257). Deleuze's thinking on the film image unmistakably draws from his philosophy of bodily forces. The image is an instance of becoming where body and brain become indistinguishable, where virtual forces are constantly becoming actual forms, forms that decompose back into the virtual, only to become actual again. In these brief remarks, I would like to follow Deleuze's non-anthropomorphic method and address the powers of the kind of scene that is capable of mobilizing thought for itself as well as its audience.

A scene in a film can be a powerful attractor of thought, it can surely think without thinking. No human arms or legs are necessary for the brain of a scene to think. Instead,

the tentacles of affection that attach to, and detach from, other body scenes are indispensable. A scene that is capable of thinking possesses these tentacles in a highly developed form—the more sensitive these tentacles, the greater the scene's capacity to think, and to carry us along in its thinking trail. If we dispense with the ghost of causality and its crippling rationalities, we may see that these tentacles of affection are not beholden to causal determination, even less are they the sign of the clockwork functioning of morality.

If strong enough, a scene can sustain the entire scaffolding of a film together through its logic of sensation. So generous is the logic of creation/augmentation that animates such a scene that it always seeks to compose a more powerful body—not only for itself, but for other bodies/scenes in the film world, close and far. Generous creation then becomes the scene's signature landmark. The thinking powers of a scene partake of the generosity of thought. Real thought multiplies and disseminates. It does not rigidly frame or fixate. Real thought is self-regenerative and regenerative of everything it comes into contact with, even if it passes through destruction. Real thought is unstoppable in its passion to do things. A strong scene is thus like the sun: at the affective disseminating centre of the film's world, it radiates intense beauty, or terror, or sadness, and a myriad other emotions that have no names.

Those who insisted in the past that montage was the essence and foundation of cinema came very close to signaling what a scene can do. But this concept that they so ardently loved possesses powers that well surpassed their imagination—the molecularly refined, mind-boggling powers of relentless transformation. Montage is the alchemy

of affection—the mechanism that enables an image to do something to another image and to have something done to it by the other image. But an image does not only transform, nor is it only transformed by, the image immediately contiguous to it. The power of montage travels further and is far more restless than any of us could have anticipated: “each new image retroactively introduces a new relation

similarly ill defined—our bodies and minds the affective zones into which the scene seeks to resonate. Each of us receives from, and gives to, the scene, in our own way. These are orphaned and scattered thoughts, severed from the scenes that generated and nursed them. I could tell you which scenes have begotten these thoughts, but there would be too many. Instead, I invite you to watch a video

The intense scene strikes you like a new, never-before-felt breath— if you are attentive, you are possessed.

among the series of preceding images, and so the image to follow is subjected to rules that must be constantly reinvented; the rule is—*improvise*” (Flaxman 45). Let’s just say that montage is not a sedentary citizen, a good neighbour to the neighbours in its proximity. The tentacles of affection of montage are far reaching nomads, a multiplicity of constantly moving magnets that attract things/images close and far.

As Spinoza remarked, consciousness is deeply steeped in the psychological illusion of freedom, hence the power of the mind over the body is fundamentally imaginary (Deleuze, *Spinoza* 60). Consciousness does not know what a body/scene can do in terms of the causes that move it to act. We know very little of what a scene can do in terms of the non-causal impulses that move it, and through which it moves us—the connections and attractions that pull it towards other scenes/images. The real causes that move the juxtaposition of effects that is montage remain largely below the threshold of consciousness.

Contrary to appearance and common understanding, a scene’s borders need not be clearly demarcated. In the realm of affection, the power of a scene may not reach as far as its programmed borders, or it may far exceed them. There are scenes without beginning, middle, or end. Scenes that revolve around an image whose movement consists of variations of stillness, the points at which intensity can be really felt. Scenes that do not move toward any point in space, but traverse vertiginous stretches of time. The intense scene strikes you like a new, never-before-felt breath—if you are attentive, you are possessed. The scene is density of affect, the unscripted and unexpected.

There are scenes that will do this and more to your body and your mind, while others will do it to mine and not yours. Each of us is a different scene, its borders

my colleague Miriam Cooley and I made—available on the *Cinephile* website at www.cinephile.ca—that attempts to capture the power of a scene to travel beyond the confines of its ‘home-film’. This video that we called “Body Affect: As It Moves” is a non-verbal essay centered upon the potency of affect that a strong scene possesses and gives away in its encounters with other scenes.

Our selection and sequencing of these images sought to let the speeds and patterns of movement of the body express the affect in the most intense and resonant way. In this piece, the affective powers of a scene are not tied to a psychological content or process, but to a physics of the emotions that defies the limits and binaries of narrative, ideology, psychology, and morality (Two pieces of advice on the video: pump up the volume, and watch past the credits).

Very little can be said about what a scene can do. Indeed, few things that a scene can do can actually be *said*. The honesty of a scene resides precisely in this simplicity: a scene always does so much more than what it says.

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Alice in the Cities

The Uses of Disorientation

Brenda Austin-Smith

This child is getting scared!
The camera slowly tracks back
The leaves tremble, the street is wet.

-Wim Wenders, *Emotion Pictures*

The enduring value of the scene, quite apart from its pedagogical value as a teachable segment or a thematic miniature, is its power to enchant, to inspire the kind of movie love that we call cinephilia. It is the scene that draws many of us back to film, “to the unique moment and to that special place—in short, to the quest for plenitude, envelopment, and enclosure [...] the enactment of a search for lost time” (Elsaesser 39). Whether re-attached to the larger work by scholarly interest or carefully preserved as a reservoir of intense experience, the scene is a privileged fragment, as likely to be fondly mis-remembered from the one-time screening, as it is to be stored and posted on a personal website for sharing, or for repeated and loving perusal.

The scene I want to describe here is from the road film *Alice in the Cities* (Wim Wenders, 1974). The scene does not do much straightforward narrative work in this languid film, but provides an example of what I can only call ‘vertiginous cinema’, film that dislocates us both emotionally and physically by representing experience in a way we

can’t fully explain, but are completely held in thrall by. This is not simply the dizziness we might feel watching a shot taken from inside a roller coaster, but rather an effect of film’s ability to transform everyday movement into something as exciting as a midway ride, and to register mundane encounters and exchanges in ways that reawaken us to their mystery.

It’s not all that easy to distinguish one scene from another in a road movie. Instead of rooms characters walk into or leave, signaling the start, the development, or the conclusion of a certain thematically significant connection, there is only the vehicle in which they sit, more or less content or unhappy in each other’s company. Stops along the highway offer the most transparent means of effecting shifts in setting, dynamics, and tone, allowing necessity—hunger, an empty gas tank—to structure breaks in the narrative. For characters in road films, scene changes spool by endlessly outside the windows of cars, trucks, and buses, offering themselves as a series of possible sets in which something more permanent could take place between the characters who move through these potentialities without stopping, immune to their picturesque appeals. Each truckstop, convenience store, and backwater town makes the same pitch: ‘C’mon, pull over. Imagine yourself here’. So when the camera fixes on something outside the car window, when something appears to catch the attention of the film itself, and not just its characters, enchantment is a possibility.

Alice in the Cities begins by focusing on the burnt-out German journalist Philip Winter (Rüdiger Vogler), who is travelling across the U.S. on a magazine assignment he is incapable of completing. Fully blocked from writing, he has turned instead to photography. His obsessive picture taking extends the aimlessness of his car trip across the country, the proliferating snapshots he stuffs into his bag as random and disconnected as glances from a car window. Philip's dependence on the camera, which he uses to document the existence of phenomena as unremarkable as a gas-station and a series of telephone poles, betrays his distance from those objects, and his attempt to know himself through recording their existence. He declares at one point that the pictures never do justice to what one actually sees, but he cannot just look with pleasure at the jumble of im-

attended a Chuck Berry concert nearby, he pulls up in front of the hotel they had stayed in the previous night. Suddenly, Alice materializes and climbs into the passenger seat. Philip is surprised but also delighted at her re-appearance. He laughs, recognizing at once her persistence, his loneliness, and their curious bond. They continue their quest. A cut takes us to the next morning, and we see Alice awoken in the back seat. Philip is already sitting at a picnic table, poring over a map. They begin the day's drive and head to the Ruhr district, where Alice is now certain her grandmother lives. Philip discovers a picture of Alice's mother tucked in a pocket of Alice's picture album, and the camera holds this woman's framed face for a few seconds. The screen goes black, and then the new scene, my scene, begins, with Philip and Alice once more in the rented Renault, driving. This

The enduring value of the scene, quite apart from its pedagogical value as a teachable segment or a thematic miniature, is its power to enchant, to inspire the kind of movie love we call cinephilia.

ages that comprise America. "Not one picture leaves you in peace," he complains. He is an anticipatory embodiment of what Thomas Elsaesser describes as our contemporary crisis of memory: "Our experience of the present is always already (media) memory, and this memory represents the recaptured attempt at self-presence: possessing the experience in order to possess the memory in order to possess the self" (40).

Soon after we meet him, Philip decides to return to Germany. At the airport, he learns of a strike that has grounded all flights to Germany, and meets a woman at the ticket counter (Lisa Kreuzer) who is also trying to return to Germany with her nine-year-old daughter, Alice (Yella Rottländer). He offers assistance and ends up sharing their hotel room while they wait for a flight scheduled to depart the following day. Alice's mother leaves the hotel to deal with a personal crisis, and in a note, promises Philip she will meet them in Amsterdam. When Alice's mother does not arrive in Amsterdam the next day, Philip and Alice begin their road trip, looking for Alice's home.

The scene I have nominated for description here appears about an hour and a half into the film, as the visual climax of a long driving sequence that begins after Philip, frustrated at Alice's inability to remember what city her grandmother lives in, drives her to a police station and turns her over to the authorities. Later that night, having

next driving sequence lasts several minutes. It is a slow and dreamy scene of Bazinian realism to which I return over and over again in order to experience the form of exhilarating disorientation caused by a sequence of shots that occurs very near its end.

This is how the scene starts: Philip is at the wheel of the rented car, and the camera films him from the right, Alice's perspective. For a moment the pensive, repetitive guitar and piano tune that we have heard from time to time throughout the film becomes audible, but fades as Alice and Philip talk about where Philip's family lives, and how long it has been since he has seen them. The camera cuts between them as they speak. As they drive out of the sunlight and into a tunnel, the camera stays fixed on Philip as the frame goes almost completely dark, the driver's side mirror a rectangle of reflected light that, as elsewhere in Wenders, repeats the frame of the film itself. Alice places the pictures of her mother and her grandmother's house on the dashboard, and we see the car drive along a street lined with houses. As they continue driving, their faces are filmed from outside the windshield, the reflections of tree branches overhead appearing to drift over their faces. There is a shot of Alice from outside the car, her face turned to the front and slightly left as unfiltered sunlight floods the middle of the frame, almost washing out her face. The car stops twice, first to let Philip get out and show the picture of the house they are looking for to an elderly couple sitting

on a bench. As they drive past old houses slated for demolition, Alice says the empty spaces between the houses look like graves. A few moments later it is Alice's turn to show the picture to a group of children sitting on a step outside of a brick building.

The scene is a reverie of travel. We see Alice's eyes almost close as she looks out the car window. She and Philip

he is riding in front of an expanse of brick wall between two doors. As he rides alongside the car, diegetic sounds of conversation, and the jabber from the cabbie's radio cut out, and the melancholy guitar and piano music returns to fill out the soundtrack. The boy is looking at someone inside the car, but we don't know for certain if it is Alice or Philip, for the reverse shot that would confirm the object of

He is looking too directly, too steadily into the camera to be part of the fiction any longer. We have been seen. The shock of being recognized by the film connects us to this boy.



say little to each other. They are supposed to be watching out for the grandmother's house, but Alice seems lost in motion and light. Philip pauses the car to ask a cab driver passing in the opposite direction if by chance he knows the location of the house they are looking for. Frustrated, Philip says they will go to Oberhausen to continue their search. He seems to approach an intersection and we see him look left.

And then the camera, filming from what has been Alice's point of view, cuts to a shot of a young boy, riding a bicycle along the sidewalk, moving from right to left as he pedals to the centre of the frame, slips back to the right, and begins to pedal steadily to keep up with the car. He looks about seven years old. He has blond hair, and is wearing black shorts. When we first see him

his gaze doesn't appear. And then it strikes me that the only person he could be looking at is me, us, the viewers. He is looking too directly, too steadily into the camera to be part of the fiction any longer. We have been seen. The shock of being recognized by the film connects us to this boy. The car is still moving through this city, but someone living here has arrested our attention and has also noticed us. We're not complete strangers in this place anymore.

The boy keeps riding alongside the car. Suddenly another child on a bike speeds by, in front of him, in a blur. But the first boy is still there, trying to stay with us, looking for all the world as if he were aware of the frame, and were playing a game with it as well as with whoever is watching him from the car. He is trying to outrun the right edge of the frame; he is not afraid of it, but knows it is there, and knows that if it catches him, he will stop being for us. The

boy looks forward and to his left once again—there is a parked car and he passes behind it, meeting us on the other side, as if making a commitment (“See you up ahead”). He rides past another door in the continuous brick wall of what must be row house apartments, past a woman leaning against yet another door looking out to the street. He looks forward again as he comes to the end of the row house unit.

There is a cut to Alice’s face, filmed from outside the car, as she looks out of the window, and slightly back. Is she watching the boy on the bike? Her head turns to the front again and she tilts her head up slightly, then back again. There is no sign in her face that she has seen him, that she and he are in the same film world, the way that we and the boy seem to be for those few seconds. Cut to the brick walls of the row houses. The boy on the bicycle is gone.



The doors of the row houses pass by. They seem to bulge out slightly. We come to the end of the block—there is a window in the right side of the frame, and a large white ‘H’ in the left, as well as a drainpipe. The sidewalk has dropped below the frameline, out of sight, and the frame itself seems tilted down to the left. And in the next second, as the car turns the corner, the brick building seems to turn, to heave itself heavily towards us in a slow revolution, swinging in slow motion towards us, like Baba Yaga’s house, deep in the forest, forever turning round and round on the legs of a chicken.¹ The brick wall takes up the entire frame. We can see neither its top nor its bottom. It is a vertiginous mo-

1. Baba Yaga is a witch in Slavic fairy tales, who in some stories helps, and in others eats, lost children. Her hut has no door and no windows, and is perched on the legs of a chicken. Only a spell can reveal how to enter the magic hut: “Turn your back to the forest, your front to me.”

ment of lost visual bearings, in which the film has the upper hand. Then the car completes its turn, and the end corner of the row house apartments appears on the left side of the frame, re-orienting us.

Somehow in this sequence of shots toward the end of a scene in which two people, recently reconciled, set off on a search together, two accidents of vision have combined to create a visual and emotional experience of attachment and disorientation. The boy on the bicycle is a *trouvaille*, one of the many with which Wenders seeds his films. His presence in the frame animates perfectly Wenders’s citation of Cezanne’s phrase “Things are disappearing. If you want to see anything, you have to hurry” (Graf 23), as well as Wenders’s belief in the Kracauerian ability of film to ‘redeem’ reality. And when I teach this

film I take care to connect its visual tone, its light, its mood, to the state of the two companions, lost in their own worlds, and to the themes and meanings of the film.

But it is really the beauty of the boy on the bike, and the collision of his real afternoon world with the fiction of Philip and Alice, that strikes me each time I see this scene, as I cue it up and play it again. And it is as if the shock of his look across the fictional street of Wenders’s film, which is the real street of his life, and then his sudden loss from

the frame, sends me a few moments later careening into that wall—or the wall careening into me. I am for a few seconds knocked out of myself, first because of film’s ability to track the real, and then because of its ability to create an illusion my body believes in. It is this scene that makes me feel, rather than just understand, what representation is.

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Snuff Boxing

Revisiting the Snuff Coda

Alexandra Heller-Nicholas

Snuff (Findlay/Nuchtern, 1976) might not be the ‘best’ film produced in the Americas in the 1970s, but it may be the decade’s most important ‘worst’ film. Rumoured to depict the actual murder of a female crewmember in its final moments, its notoriety consolidated the urban legend of snuff film. The snuff film legacy has manifested across a broad range of media, from fictional snuff narratives like *Vacancy* (Nimród Antal, 2007) and *8mm* (Joel Schumacher, 1999), to purportedly real snuff footage distributed online and through mobile phones. Despite *Snuff*’s status as a unique trash artefact, the suddenness with which the controversy exploded into the public arena allowed it very little time for a ‘micro’ analytical moment.¹ The snuff film enigma was so intoxicatingly extra-diegetic that it instantly transcended the nuts-and-bolts details of the film itself. The shocking impact of those final five minutes appeared to render close analysis unnecessary: *Snuff*, like snuff, was predicated upon a hyperactive theatricality of ambiguity, rumour and moral panic.

The power inherent in the word “snuff” is dependent upon its vagueness; its enigmatic force stems directly from

its nebulosity as a concept. Not only has snuff been defined in different ways across a range of different contexts, it is the haziness with which the term is utilized and applied in practice in both critical and non-critical discourse that enforces its status as such a resilient and dynamic taboo. Simply, a contemporary understanding of snuff is located at the intersection of film, death and “the real.” The snuff movie may be intrinsically filmic in form, but the force of its impact—the fear, anger, revulsion and fascination it produces—invites engagement with discourses about gender, power and the very notion of representation itself.

Over thirty years since its release, *Snuff* receives very little critical attention outside of historical analyses of film violence and the antipornography movement, or paracinematic critiques that more often than not mock the undeveloped gore-literacy of those who fell for the hoax at the time of the film’s release.² But considering that snuff film has remained such a consistently viable source of terror (despite shifts in both camera technologies and modes of distribution), an exhumation of the *Snuff* coda

1. As discussed in Brottman (1997), Hawkins (2000), Jackson (2003), Johnson and Schaefer (1993), Kerekes and Slater (1995) and Stine (1999).

2. “In retrospect, it seems amazing that anyone mistook *Snuff*’s violence for cinema vérité” (Hawkins 137); “Not only is the gore obviously fake, but the execution of the special effects is painfully inept” (Stine).

raises a startlingly overlooked feature. While the unnamed ‘director’ figure and his blonde victim remain two of the most notorious onscreen figures in paracinematic history, the presence of a third figure, ‘June’ (the only named person in the entire sequence)³ has gone almost completely unacknowledged.⁴ It is in light of this omission that this article revisits the *Snuff* coda.

The *Snuff* Scandal

Given the scope of its impact, the production history of *Snuff* is appropriately complex. The version released in cinemas in 1976 was a conglomerate of two sections, filmed four years apart. The first 74 minutes were made by husband-and-wife director/cinematographer team Michael and Roberta Findlay in 1971, who were renowned for their “roughies” such as *Body of a Female* (1965), *The Ultimate Degenerate* (1969), and the *Her Flesh* trilogy (1967-9). Initially called *The Slaughter*, it was a low-budget exploitation film made in South America based loosely on the Charles Manson ‘Family’ murders. The gory

coda in New York with director Simon Nuchtern and marketing the final product as an actual snuff film, Shackleton’s promotional campaign included the release of phony newspaper clippings that documented the outrage of non-existent moral conservatives (Stine). By the time the hoax was exposed, it was too late: *Snuff* had captured the interest of the public, and an urban legend was born.

Antipornography feminist responses to *Snuff* were fiery. With its gimmicky, self-imposed “X” rating for violence, the blurring between “hard-core gore” and “hard-core porn” (Johnson and Schaefer 51) meant that for many—most notably Beverly LaBelle in her essay “*Snuff*—The Ultimate in Woman-Hating” (1976)—the authenticity of the violence was unquestionable. If sex in X-rated porn is real, it follows that so is murder in X-rated gore films. But the eventual exposure of the hoax was far from a chink in the antipornography movement’s armour. This confusion regarding the authenticity of the *Snuff* coda allowed antipornography feminist discourse to smoothly negotiate the gap between the literal and the symbolic, converting their debate from the singular and text-specific

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coda was made in 1975 and was funded by distributor Allan Shackleton of Monarch Releasing Corporation (Johnson and Schaefer 43). Shackleton had bought *The Slaughter* years earlier, but had encountered difficulties releasing it on the Findlays’ familiar grindhouse circuit due to what were—even by forgiving exploitation standards—severe technical problems with the audio dubbing (Kerekes and Slater 11). Hastily organizing the filming of the notorious

to the broader domain of representation. As Jane Caputi put it, the confusion in *Snuff* between what was real murder and what was a simulation was precisely the issue: “there seems to be no sure way to discern on film what is faked and what is [...] real, which is a ‘symbolic annihilation’ and which is an actual one” (168). In terms of reception, she argued, this indistinguishability rendered them effectively (and regressively) the same.

3. She is called by an off-camera voice in shot 7, and is directed to “hold her down.” The low quality of the sound recording here slightly blurs the sound of the name, but on careful examination, it is either June or Jude. That Jude is generally a male name and that the figure is clearly female suggests, purely by a process of deduction, that her name is quite probably June.

4. Eithne Johnson and Eric Schaefer do identify her presence, but only in passing. They do not mention that she is named, nor is any further significance placed upon her involvement: “After briefly embracing on an adjacent bed while fully clothed, the director pins the actress down with the help of a female crew member and beings to torture her with a knife” (49-50).

The scale and voracity of this type of feminist discourse rendered close analysis of the film itself redundant. As Johnson and Schaefer observe, its broader cultural meaning was always the source of attention: “Among those who denounced *Snuff*, morality assumed greater significance in their arguments than the film itself, which was often inaccurately described, whether for rhetorical effect or for lack of close analysis” (51). So great was the symbolic force of the *Snuff* coda that it overshadowed interest in its actual content. The absence of June in the vast amount of criticism concerning the film suggests that this still has yet to be remedied.

The *Snuff* Coda

Many have observed that formal traits such as continuity editing belie the authenticity of the *Snuff* coda as an actual murder filmed in one continuous take.⁵ However, of greater concern to a contemporary consideration of the film and the surrounding scandal is the omission of this third figure. *The Slaughter* ends with pregnant blonde actress Terry London (a character not wholly dissimilar to Sharon Tate) being stabbed on a bed by a female member of the Family-like cult. This scene fades and then cuts to a long establishing shot of 51 seconds that marks the beginning of the *Snuff* coda. The shot is composed of a group of people surrounding the bed: in the centre of the room is a blonde woman dressed in (virtuous) white, and in the foreground on the side, a

including the brunette woman later identified as June. This woman walks off camera to the left of the shot momentarily, only to reappear at the head of the unused bed where she adjusts a pillow, and takes notes on her clipboard.

The blonde woman expresses discomfort at having sex in front of “all these people,” but regardless, she and the director begin to kiss. There is an abrupt shift to hand-held camera movement that, when combined with the shots of cameras and other cameramen in the frame, creates a sense that these events are being filmed ‘live’. Zooming in on the couple, the director is holding a knife, while in the background June is focused intently upon her clipboard. As the couple lie kissing on the bed, June puts down her clipboard: this small act significantly alters her involvement from a ‘crewmember’ to an active performer in the action that follows.



brunette woman dressed in (villainous) black who carries a clipboard. Once the “cut” command is given, everyone works busily. The camera pans across, and more crewmembers are shown in the background. In the foreground is a second bed: its illogical introduction into the scene, combined with its privileged placement in the foreground, foreshadows its significance.

Two separate groups now form. On the centre-left, the ‘director’ speaks to the blonde woman. They touch each other in a sexually familiar way, and he tells her how the murder scene they just shot aroused him. On the centre-right of the shot three crewmembers are in discussion,

5. Say Johnson and Schaefer: “Continuity errors from shot to shot reveal the artifice, as does the actress’s prosthetic torso, from which the director pulls the entrails” (40). For Neil Jackson, “the cutaways, multiple camera angles and unconvincing prosthetics utilized in *Snuff*’s final sequence all signal the artifice underlying the film’s [...] central conceit.”

The blonde woman becomes increasingly agitated when she realizes that she and the director are being filmed. June stands at the end of the bed next to a small table with a collection of weapons placed upon it, and a toolbox on the floor. The *mise-en-scène* frames June as a sort of ‘nurse’ about to assist in surgery, a comparison that gains resonance throughout the scene. As the blonde woman becomes more frantic, the albeit brief point-of-view shot of June from the director’s perspective that follows is integral to this re-evaluation of the *Snuff* coda. This shot could be easily mistaken as a point-of-view shot of June from the victim’s perspective: it is only logical perhaps to feel that, as another woman, June is the blonde woman’s most likely ally, and her only means of possible escape from this increasingly dangerous situation. However, the shot is not from the victim’s perspective at all, which beckons the question: Why would the director stop at this pivotal point and look to see what June’s reaction was? Regardless of the answer, there is no denying that this look formally includes

her in the action unfolding onscreen. The presence of June in the *Snuff* coda therefore rejects the simplistic ‘men versus women’ scenario that it is so often purported to be, and upon which much of its ideological debate is based. Its sexual politics are far more complex. The female victim is not only at the mercy of a man, she is tortured by a man, and restrained by a smiling woman. As an off-camera male voice directs June to “hold her down,” it may be argued that June is following these orders to avoid being tortured herself. But the evidence within the coda does not support such a reading; her smiling face belies such a claim.

This formal inclusion of June is reiterated just before the first act of violence when the blonde woman’s shoulder is cut. During a three-second shot (as the director asks his victim “You think I’m kidding do you?”), June is also granted a point-of-view shot as she looks at the director. While it is



only a brief shot, it is a crucial one, since it is June’s perspective that is formally privileged and it reciprocates the glance just described. Her involvement is made explicit: this shot not only sets up a formal relationship between June and the director, but acknowledges that a woman is watching these events. This suggests the presence of an active and sadistic *female gaze*, and so once again, the battle lines between men and women may not be as clearly demarcated here as has been commonly contended.

Moreover on this point, June becomes increasingly excited in her remaining time on screen. On numerous occasions, she is shown in the same shot as the victim and the director, smiling and restraining the woman. After a saw is introduced to the gruesome proceedings, her pleasure becomes even clearer. As the victim’s suffering and terror increase, her reaction—legs straddled, mouth open, smiling—implies a sexual aspect to her involvement. The last shot of June’s face (there is a brief shot after this of her hands holding the blonde woman down) is taken

from the point-of-view of the director, whose gaze captures his accomplice’s arousal at the victim’s trauma. June’s involvement in the violence is confirmed once more as she is granted the privileged reaction shot to the most explicit gore shot thus far when the victim’s hand is severed.

This is the last time June is shown onscreen. As the violence enters its second, more explicit stage, it is worth asking: Where is she? Where did she go? The soundtrack becomes increasingly ambiguous as the sound of the victim’s final breaths blurs with groans of pleasure ostensibly coming from the director. In the moments before the blonde woman’s is eviscerated, a heartbeat can also be heard. But whose heartbeat is it? It may be the victim’s, because the sound is only heard when her exposed organs are shown. However, as she is dying, one may deduce that her heartbeat would not be so steady. Alternatively, it may be the director’s, but the sound appears to come from a point closer to the camera. Perhaps it is a synthetic estimation of the spectator’s own heartbeat from the perspective of their surrogate onlooker, the cameraman. If the latter is the case, the emphasis of the soundtrack is significantly not on the onscreen bodies themselves, but rather upon the spectator’s own capacity to witness violence. This would appear to consciously acknowledge the spectator’s complicity in the onscreen violence. As the lines between diegetic and non-diegetic spaces crumble, there manifests within the film a self-reflexive awareness as it articulates that yes, audience, the bodily violence on display is there solely for *your* benefit. That snuff and screen violence in general are so often addressed in terms of the visual makes this a unique aural indictment of the spectator and their involvement with onscreen violence.

One can also speculate that there is another possibility: the heartbeat may belong to June. Having been so pleasurably involved in the action, it makes sense that she is still watching. If this is the case, despite her physical absence within the frame, she is (again) granted a privileged position that suggests the victim’s torture has in fact been a twisted sexual union between the director and June. That she shifts from assistant to audience at the same point that the violence so drastically increases exposes what has been implied throughout the entire sequence: the possibility that the *Snuff* coda may be a filmic haiku of deviant romance between June and the director on par with longer cinematic love ballads like *The Honeymoon Killers* (Leonard Kastle, 1970) or *Natural Born Killers* (Oliver Stone, 1994). It is only logical that discussion about snuff film leads to other notorious examples such as *Cannibal Holocaust* (Ruggero Deodato, 1980) and the Japanese “guinea pig” films (1985-1991), and to the gruesome home movies of Californian serial killers Leonard Lake and Charles Ng. But the

relationship between June and the director in the *Snuff* coda offers another film history and true-crime heritage: their story might fit more seamlessly in a consideration of cases such as Fred and Rosemary West in the United Kingdom, Karla Homolka and Paul Bernardo in Canada, Catherine and David Birnie in Australia, and Gerald and Charlene Gallego in the United States.

Taken less symptomatically, this twisted romance between June and the director also reflects one of the key aspects of the first 74 minutes of the film itself. *The Slaughter* and the *Snuff* coda are so often viewed as separate entities because of their production history that it is perhaps too easy to miss how explicitly the coda relates to the film as a whole

splatter and cocktail-wiener guts may seem a little kitsch, it is difficult to deny the disorientating effectiveness of this trickery. While few would dare defend *Snuff* as any great cinematic masterpiece, that previous analyses of the film have generally ignored the role of June is a telling omission. This article does not suggest that the presence of June suddenly transforms *Snuff* into a progressive text—in fact, there is a strong argument to be made that the idea of a woman being sexually aroused and complicit in the torture of another woman is evidence of some deeply regressive male fantasies regarding violence against women. Not only are women *not* offended by it, it seems to say, but they enjoy it too. In this sense, the film functions as an active breaking down of the

Yes, audience, the bodily violence on display is there solely for your benefit.

(Johnson and Schaefer, and Mikita Brottman's writing on the film are notable exceptions). That *The Slaughter* tells of a group of women on a murderous rampage neatly provides a contrast with the coda, marking it as a desperate, and both physically and formally violent, return to a male-dominated status quo. A simple body count supports this claim: as Brottman states, "virtually all the violence in *Snuff* is perpetrated by women on men, or other women" (104). After the all-girl killing spree that makes up the bulk of *The Slaughter*, it is of note that the first time a man kills anyone in the film is almost an hour in (and in his defence, he shoots one of the female gang members after he himself has been stabbed and the women have killed an elderly woman and a young female child during a hold up at a general store). Even more explicitly, *The Slaughter* concentrates much of its (admittedly loose) plot upon a deviant romance between Angelica (Margarita Amuchástegui) and its Charles Manson figure, Satan (Enrique Larratelli); the gruesome relationship between June and the director provides a neat parallel to this plot element within *The Slaughter*. Like June herself, however, this brief and degenerate affair has been lost to history, sacrificed in favour of the ideological debates that so famously marked the film's original release.

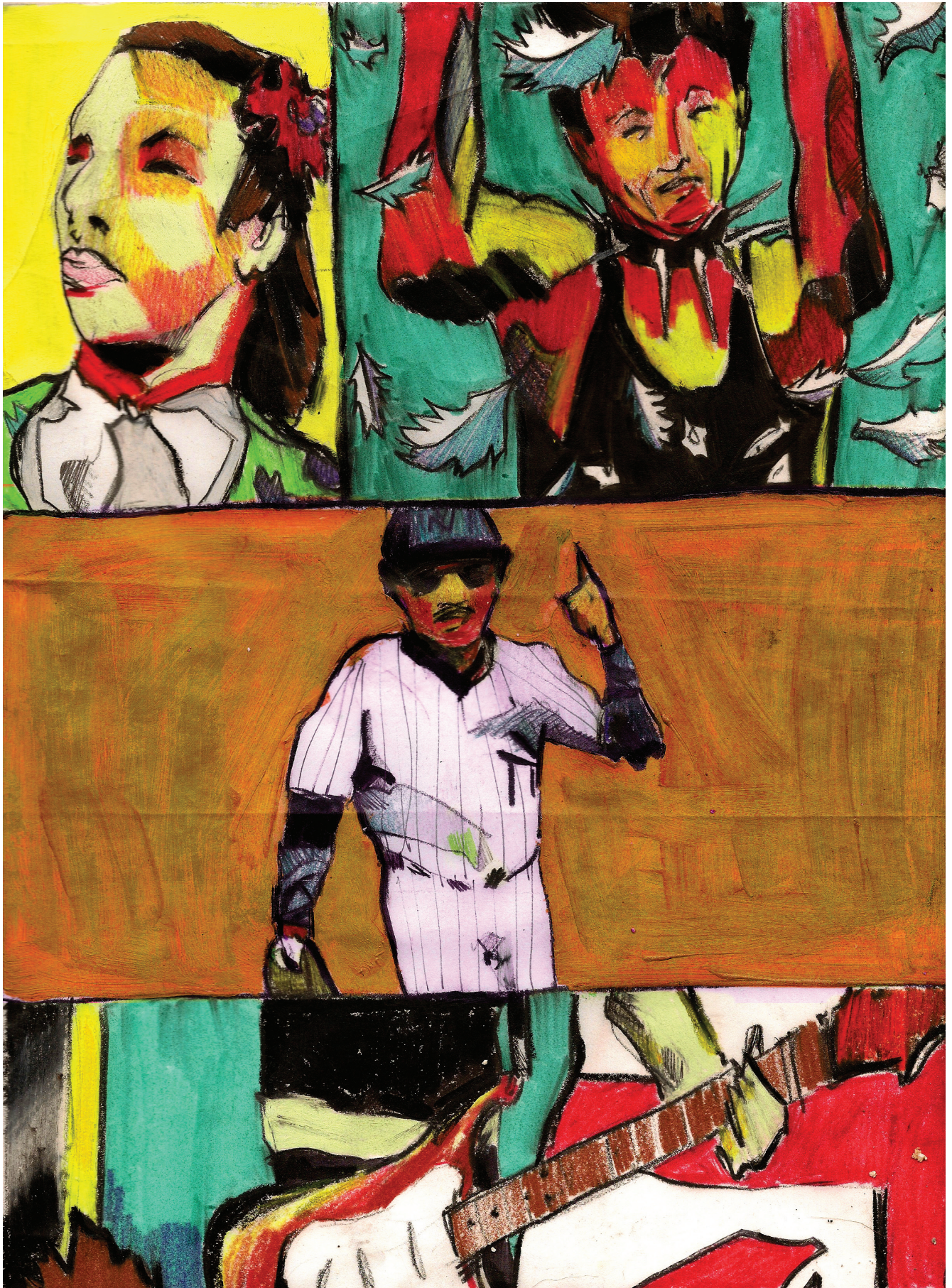
The final seconds of *Snuff* show the director disembowelling his victim, removing viscera and lifting it victoriously above his head with a scream. As the screen fades to white, two male voices whisper and ask, "Did you get it all?" Bereft of end credits and lacking other formal indicators of closure, the suddenness of the film's conclusion adds weight to claims of its authenticity. Even to gore-literate viewers today for whom the ketchup-red

united force of women that was so visible around the period of the film's release. Importantly, however, the fact that June has been so widely ignored means that these very real issues have yet to be properly addressed. It is of no small interest to debates on gender and film that in the name of championing the rights of one woman, another has been eradicated so completely from the cultural memory. Any critical attempts to grasp the broader phenomenon of snuff film—be it as an urban legend, a popular fictional trope or as a real, tangible part of contemporary screen cultures—must reconsider the ease with which historical perspectives regarding *Snuff* have been so dramatically skewed away from any reading that incorporates the presence and function of June.

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That 70s Sequence

Remembering the Bad Old Days in Summer of Sam

R. Colin Tait

Hello Ladies and Gentleman, Boys and Girls. My name is Jimmy Breslin. I'm a writer. I write about New York, the city of my birth where I've lived and worked all my life. The city that I love and hate both equally. Today things are much different. Business is booming up, up and up. Crime is down, down, down. Homicides are the lowest it's been since 1961. Well it wasn't always like this. This film is about a different time. A different place. The good old days. The hot, blistering summer of 1977. There are eight million stories in the naked city and this was one of them.

- Jimmy Breslin, *Summer of Sam*

Why, in the 1990s, did so many films obsess over and imitate distinctly 1970s film style, iconography, and content? A cycle of films, including *Casino* (Martin Scorsese, 1995), *Boogie Nights* (Paul Thomas Anderson, 1997), *The Ice Storm* (Ang Lee, 1997), *The Last Days of Disco* (Walt Stillman, 1998), *54* (Mark Christopher, 1998), *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*

(Terry Gilliam, 1998), and *The Virgin Suicides* (Sofia Coppola, 1999), obsessively recreated the 'bad objects' of Americana—drugs, gambling, pornography, serial-killing, and bankrupt cities—within the urban spaces of the 1970s. This cycle continued into the 2000s with *Almost Famous* (Cameron Crowe, 2000), *Blow* (Ted Demme, 2001), and more recently, *Zodiac* (David Fincher, 2007) and *American Gangster* (Ridley Scott, 2007). All of these works privileged the 1970s as a lost object of desire, as opposed to earlier nostalgic representations like *American Graffiti* (George Lucas, 1973) and its TV cousin, *Happy Days* (Garry Marshall 1974-1984), which longed for the innocence of pre-Vietnam, Eisenhower-esque small-town America. Thus, the evocation of the 'good old/bad old days' dichotomy warrants that we wade deeply into this murky phenomenon to explain its historical significance, its narrative logic, as well as exactly what this specific brand of nostalgia is trying to express. Spike Lee's *Summer of Sam* (1999) provides an excellent case study of how this trend

THAT 80S MONTAGE

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Rocky IV



Flashdance



Top Gun

plays out, in a scene that presents a dazzling display of 70s iconography choreographed to The Who's "Baba O'Riley/Teenage Wasteland."¹ Not only does the scene absorb the logic of the music video and summarize the film, but it also presents a personalized rendition of the era, which we can deconstruct to get to the root of this nostalgia.

That Spike Lee's generation of filmmakers came of age in the 1970s might begin to explain their peculiar longing for that decade. Similar to the directors of the Hollywood renaissance before them, the so-called "Rebels on the Backlot" (see Waxman) modelled themselves after the directors and films they watched during their formative years. As deWaard argues, these artists (and Spike Lee in particular) emulated a personal form of filmmaking while branding themselves within in a highly-competitive marketplace. This *ciné*-literate generation of artists found themselves imitating American icons like Martin Scorsese and setting their scenes to the soundtracks of their youth. One of the hallmarks of this nostalgic practice remains the '1970s Sequence', which filmmakers as diverse as Richard Linklater, Steven Soderbergh, Quentin Tarantino, Wes Anderson, P.T. Anderson, Todd Haynes, Ang Lee, and Spike Lee all insert into their work. That each of these directors made a tribute film to the 1970s marked the cultural values of a generation (X?) which came of age and rose to prominence. More often than not, these sequences disrupt the coherence of their narratives, presenting what is essentially a music video to a 70s song. While loosely inspired by the events within the movie, they often move outside of their narrative frameworks to express a totally different logic, favouring style over formal structure.

As is the case with *Summer of Sam's* "Baba O'Riley" scene, such sequences possess a storytelling function independent of the plot-line, like a condensation of the movie's emotional spirit, which resembles the movie in miniature. Rapid-fire cutting, temporal manipulation (usually slow-motion), and over-processed and tinted film stocks together comprise a remarkably standard stylistic of the present's nostalgic gaze upon the 70s. All of these techniques fetishize a lost era's cinematic style while paradoxically evoking a contemporary visuality supplied by modern (often digital) technology. The influence of postmodernism, whether stated as an economic or aesthetic mode, remains central to this theorization, particularly because these sequences

1. The song itself is often mistakenly referred to as "Teenage Wasteland."

are textbook examples of cinematic pastiche. The curious fascination with this raw and unprepossessing recent past, compounded by an aesthetic that betrays its own present-tense, endows these films with a schizophrenic sense of waning affect.

Similarly, one cannot overstate the importance of MTV and the considerable influence that popular music has had in contemporary cinema since the late 1960s. This phenomenon accelerated even further in the 1980s, particularly as directors such as Russell Mulcahy (*Highlander*, 1986) pioneered the art of short-form (narrative) music video-making for the British pop group Duran Duran. In America, others like John Landis (“Thriller,” 1983) and Martin Scorsese (“Bad,” 1987) joined the ranks of directors who alternated between film and music video making

and prefigured the multi-angle shots and rhythmic editing of the music video.

By the 1980s, movies like *Flashdance* (Adrian Lyne, 1983), *Top Gun* (Tony Scott, 1986), *Ferris Bueller’s Day Off* (John Hughes, 1986) and *Footloose* (Herbert Ross, 1984) inherited this narrative logic by inserting musical montages in the center of their action. *Fame* (Alan Parker, 1980) also embodied this phenomenon, perhaps most vividly by fusing musical (and music video) logic within a distinctly ‘real’ locale. Far from sheer musical escape, these sequences became crucial fixtures for conveying narrative information: whether an audition for Juilliard, a volleyball game, a visit to the art gallery, a gymnastic display of rhythm, or a (clichéd) exercise regimen in sports movies

In this era, traditional cause-and-effect narratives were destabilized to accommodate material that could be repurposed for music videos.

in the 1980s. Additionally, the 1990s saw the rise of a new generation who began their careers in the advertising and music video industries; David Fincher (Madonna’s “Express Yourself,” “Vogue”), Spike Jonze (The Beastie Boys’ “Sabotage,” Weezer’s “Buddy Holly”), and Michel Gondry (Bjork’s “Human Behaviour”) all moved into feature films within the decade.

As the film and music industries continued to aesthetically converge, videos served to cross-market ancillary products, often under the same corporate banner. The function of the movie soundtrack became increasingly important, not only for the studio’s bottom-line but also for creating investment opportunities that led to cross-ownership between studios and music companies.² In this era, traditional cause-and-effect narratives were destabilized to accommodate material that could be repurposed for music videos. The result was a platform that was able to sell both the movie and the soundtrack simultaneously. An early example of this phenomenon was *Saturday Night Fever* (John Badham, 1977), which contained full-length song and dance sequences within its diegesis in a manner that simultaneously resembled real-time musical numbers

like *Rocky IV* (Sylvester Stallone, 1985). The flashback was also deployed frequently, as seen in the first episode of *Miami Vice* (1984-1990), which replayed whole units of narrative information with rapid-fire montage, cross-cutting a multiplicity of characters, places, and times to the tune of Phil Collins’s “In the Air Tonight.” Though *Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1977) had often served as the prime example of ancillary market industry convergence (including the movie-soundtrack), the succeeding generation produced soundtrack-ready films that were tailor-made to exploit the burgeoning movie-video synergy. For example, both *Ghost Busters* (Ivan Reitman, 1984) and *Dirty Dancing* (Emile Ardolino, 1987) spawned multiple number-one hits and generated music videos that were essentially highlight reels taken straight from their respective movies, serving the dual purpose of advertising the films and their soundtracks. The same is true in the case of *Purple Rain* (Albert Magnoli, 1984), where the song “When Doves Cry” marked the occasion for a fully-realized music video, which was extracted from the film and sent straight to MTV. More importantly, this type of sequence ultimately transformed the narrative habits of contemporary films to the point where almost every Hollywood film started to adopt this convention. By the 1990s, this logic became internalized in a filmmaking

2. For an extended discussion of media conglomeration and the six major studios, see Schatz.

practice that not only looked to the past but also evoked a desire to set memorable sequences to memorable songs.

The '70s sequence', then, is as much the synthesis of these new narrative functions as it is the by-product of the rise of an *auteur* sensibility in the 1990s, the infusion of a music video narrative logic, and the emulation of 70s film-making styles. The indie *auteurs* revisited the era of their adolescence to recapture the textures, sights, and 'super' sounds of the 70s. Consequently, some of the most memorable scenes of the past 15 years have set their action to a purposefully 'retro' soundtrack. In trying to recapture the emotional resonance of the era, the '70s sequence' is invariably a bravura display of directorial prowess, which taps the full array of cinematic devices, including music, flash-back editing, and slow-motion visuals.³ In short, they are *functional* music videos, but their influence expands even further. In the past two decades, they have become a basic storytelling unit of contemporary movie-making, inspiring and ultimately affecting the way that we make and view film today.

Prominent examples of this phenomenon include the opening credit sequence in *Reservoir Dogs* (Quentin Tarantino, 1992), the introduction of Max Fischer (Jason Schwartzman), as well as Max's vengeful feud with Herman

Not surprisingly, several of the aforementioned filmmakers attempt to stage scenes in the same manner as Scorsese⁵ (for instance, the long-take opening sequence in *Boogie Nights* or the summarizing montage in *Summer of Sam*).⁶ The centrality of music within each of these works conveys the centrality of a seventies soundtrack in reproducing the desire for a lost authenticity, no matter how 'bad' it may have been. The video-logic, then, has become such a vital component to the craft of contemporary filmmaking that we have now reached the point where these scenes are often more memorable than the movies themselves, which is the case in *Summer of Sam*.

Summer of Sam

Lee's film is the ideal text for this kind of analysis since it recreates the ultimate object of 1970s nostalgia in the form of New York City, circa 1977. The film contextualizes the David Berkowitz killings within the cultural milieu of a South Bronx neighbourhood, rendering the spirit of the times by presenting viewers with a jumble of multiple narratives, characters, and locations. Set during NYC's 1977 heat wave, the narrative oscillates between the story of an Italian-American South Bronx neighbourhood

The indie auteurs revisited the era of their adolescence to recapture the textures, sights, and 'super' sounds of the 70s.

Blume (Bill Murray) in *Rushmore* (Wes Anderson, 1998), the scene of adolescents playing records in *The Virgin Suicides*, the "Tiny Dancer" reconciliation in *Almost Famous*, and the disco/porno montages in *Boogie Nights*. Martin Scorsese's 1990s comeback also channels the 1970s in such a way that many of his films' songs serve as individual narrative units.⁴

3. This is precisely what occurs in *Forrest Gump* (Robert Zemeckis, 1994) as the film's wall-to-wall music both telegraphs and dictates the narrative logic of the film. On the one hand, the music connotes the era, while on the other it completely dictates the stylistic choices by Zemeckis regarding cinematography, editing and content. Furthermore, this film uses this logic to move through the 50s, 60s, 70s, and the 80s.

4. This is particularly true of *GoodFellas*, which sets the standard for this 70s aesthetic with its extended mega-mixes of period songs, and *Casino* which seemingly consists entirely of these narrated set-pieces staged and edited to music.

and the hunt of murderer David Berkowitz, the '.38 Special Killer'. The relationship between past and present is explicitly narrated in the opening monologue by famous New York columnist Jimmy Breslin, who is presented in the Disneyfied, commodified, and globalized space of "New 42nd Street." From this vantage point, Breslin speaks of the "hot, blistering summer of 1977" as the "good old days," somewhat paradoxically evoking nostalgia for a presum-

5. The influence of Scorsese in this moment on the emerging filmmakers (and indeed, upon himself) is an important component of this analysis, particularly in relation to his signature long-take, and his 'summarizing montages', utilized throughout *Casino* and in the final minutes of *GoodFellas*.

6. It is worth mentioning the near-Oedipal struggle that 1990s filmmakers have with 1970s auteurs such as Scorsese, De Palma, and Coppola. In this regard see Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*.

ably 'worse' time while privileging it over the sanitized present. In doing so, he foregrounds the 1970s as his (and our) lost object of desire, despite the fact that the sights and sounds of the events of that summer reflected the hysteria of an overheated city at the mercy of a serial killer. As critic Mick LaSalle aptly defines it, *Summer of Sam* is "a movie nostalgic for a bad time." It is less invested in finding and catching a serial killer on the loose than it is in documenting the sordid details of the era in which it is set. At once violent and celebratory, the film's central sequence, set to The Who's "Baba O'Riley" summarizes the film's narrative concerns while compressing many characters into a single narrative sequence. An in-depth analysis of this scene reveals the relationships between the narration of the past, cinematic nostalgia, and our contemporary obsession with the 1970s, as well as Lee's projection of baseness onto that era.

Moving beyond Lee's desire to recreate the past involves remembering that the 1970s was the time when the bottom dropped out of America's seemingly endless rise to economic and military dominance. Still facing the psychological effects of a drawn-out conflict in Vietnam, recovering from the hostile battles of the 1960s civil-rights movements, coping with political assassinations, dealing with the global impact of an international oil crisis and New York City's bankruptcy, the 1970s represent the moment that Andreas Killen dubs America's "nervous breakdown" (1). The films and TV series of this era, particularly those depicting New York's inner-city life such as *The French Connection* (William Friedken, 1971), *Dog Day Afternoon* (Sidney Lumet, 1975), *Taxi Driver* (Martin Scorsese, 1976), and *Kojak* (Abby Mann, 1973-78), all presented the new realities of this 'white flight' from the city's poverty and squalor in a near-documentary fashion that seems almost foreign to us nowadays.⁷

Exactly why we may have *nostalgia* for these 'bad' times is answered in part by an explication of the term itself. Linda Hutcheon's etymological interpretation of nostalgia reveals its original usage for describing the pain of missing a homeland experienced by people who had moved from it (2-3). In this sense, nostalgia represents the longing for the poor, yet culturally distinctive spaces of New York City in the 1970s, which have been effaced by New York's post-modernity in all its Disneyfied, McDonaldized, and

7. *Taxi Driver* captures one of the most extreme examples of the contrast between now and then as its on-location shooting in New York's porno-theatre/prostitution ridden alley of Times Square/42nd Street stands in stark contradistinction to the "Disneyfied" places from where Breslin speaks.

THAT 70S SEQUENCE

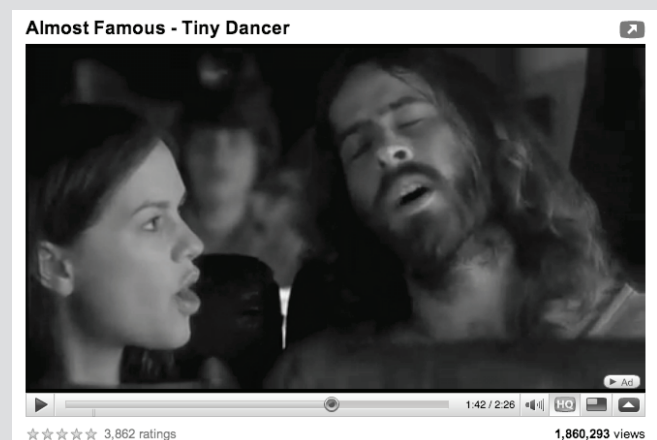
Visit cinephile.ca to see our selection of 70s sequences, including *Forrest Gump*, *GoodFellas*, *Casino*, *Reservoir Dogs*, and *The Virgin Suicides*



Rushmore



Boogie Nights



Almost Famous

Starbucks-ridden mutations. Despite the poverty, violence, riots, and killings, New York in the 70s is still wistfully remembered for the emergence of its many 'scenes'. These scenes are all distinctly 'American' in character, opposing the rising tide of multinational finance and an incipient globalized and commodified postmodernity. The advent of post-Stonewall Greenwich village, the Velvet Underground, Warhol's factory, Club 54, Disco, and the punk showcase club CBGB are all emblematic of the 'scenes' that arose from the decade's squalor. In restaging these scenes

Badalucco) is stretched across the screen and rendered in the bleached hues of overexposed film stock. The killer's image is accompanied by an uncanny dripping noise, which follows the beads of sweat that fall from his nose. This image, repeated throughout the montage, synthesizes the issues of heat, insanity, and violence, which serve as undercurrents in the film. The danger and random hysteria that Berkowitz represented is demonstrated by his grisly shooting of two more victims within the first several shots of the montage. Paradoxically, Ritchie is privileged with more narrative

In this sense, nostalgia represents the longing for the poor, yet culturally distinctive spaces of New York City in the 70s, which have been effaced by postmodernity in all its Disneyfied, McDonalized, and Starbucks-ridden mutations.

and these neighbourhoods with faithful verisimilitude, filmmakers reinvigorate a lost desire for locality—the lost homeland, so to speak—that postmodernity has erased from view. It is precisely this series of good objects arising from the bad that 70s nostalgia, the 70s sequence, and *Summer of Sam's* "Baba O'Riley" montage all attempt to recapture.

The scene begins with the diegetic sound of a needle hitting a record, shot in extreme close-up. We then hear the needle skip, and it is swiftly replaced by Ritchie's (Adrian Brody) hand. The record is *Who's Next*, a profound influence on Ritchie's identity and his escape from his ethnic neighbourhood, his parents' basement, and the realities of his professional life. We can see this scene outlining Ritchie's transition from Mod to punk style within the course of the film while simultaneously expressing his status as a liminal figure within the larger story. He is a punk rocker in a disco area and speaks with a mock British accent in the Italian neighbourhood in which he lives. He dances at a queer theatre, allowing men to perform oral sex on him for money, which further marks his difference. Ritchie's employ stands at odds with his sexuality, rendering him asexual, yet sexualized; this phenomenon is amply documented within the sequence and ultimately leads to his savage beating at the film's end.

The scene is bracketed by an extreme close-up of the killer himself, as the sweaty image of Berkowitz (Michael

agency than the killer in this sequence and elsewhere, an interesting move for a filmmaker purporting to tell the story of a serial killer. This mirroring effect, as well as a catalogue of Ritchie's 'non-normative' behaviour—including his presence in the Punk scene at the birthplace of American punk 'CBGBs' and his fetishized dancing at the club where his act consists of knifing dummies on a stage—sets the course of the later narrative and transfers the suspicion from the killer to Ritchie, something that foreshadows the rest of the film.

While Ritchie provides the initial rationale for the sequence (to the point that we can hear his voice singing along to the record), Lee's montage allows the viewer to condense and traverse spaces and times in order to present both an abbreviated and accelerated temporality. Additionally, Lee highlights the subcultural, rather than the dominant cultural elements of New York City, locating Hutcheon's 'lost homeland' in New York's localized and marginalized 'scenes'. Thus does Lee rejuvenate our interest in quotidian lives by ranging through the entire cast of characters and seizing upon their motivations in momentary glimpses, including Vinnie's (John Leguizamo) penance at the church, the junkie shooting up, the Bensonhurst boys beating someone up with baseball bats, and the drag queen smoking a cigarette. And yet, when the music slows down in the middle of the sequence, Ritchie and Vinnie enjoy a moment of peace to watch the New York Yankees' Reggie Jackson as he strides in slow motion across the field during

their World Series win over the L.A. Dodgers. The narrative logic of this moment privileges the celebratory tone of the film, offering another icon of ‘authenticity’ from this era who is juxtaposed against David Berkowitz.

Lee stages multiple temporalities within the sequence. This can best be seen by looking at the various guitars throughout, as Ritchie is seen buying the instrument he has in the first several shots mid-sequence. Another falls from the sky, out of what we must assume was his apartment. This guitar floats downward and Ritchie—screaming “No!”—hides his head. Often, these images are linked poetically rather than realistically throughout the montage. Finally, the sequence summarizes a great deal of the film, which is as involved in telling the story of a serial killer as it is in tracing its larger effects. *Summer of Sam* attempts to re-inscribe the tensions of that transitional time in history by relating the clashes between races, neighbourhoods, cultures, and subcultures of New York City, circa 1977.

Nostalgia for a ‘Bad Time’

Returning to the larger context of nostalgia for the 70s in *Summer of Sam*, the film continues the trend of mining 1970s imagery and iconography, which includes the decline of the porno industry (*Boogie Nights*), local control of the mafia and Vegas (*Casino*), the rise and fall of the cocaine trade (*Blow*), and the last gasp of ‘stadium rock’ (*Almost Famous*). Serial killing serves as one of the basest of these 70s phenomena, as the film presents a cross-section of ‘ugly’ 70s objects, including the decline of disco alongside an emerging punk scene, swinging and cross-dressing, racial tensions, neighbourhood bigotry, and swearing.⁸

As *Summer of Sam* exploits certain stylistic traits that indicate its participation in a larger 90s nostalgic phenomenon and setting in the recent past, it is worth considering how the movie pulls off its effect, particularly by way of connotation. Fredric Jameson states that “the nostalgia film was never a matter of some old-fashioned ‘representation’ of historical content” but rather the desire to express the sensation of history by way of ‘stylistic connotation’ (27). A viewer’s impression of the past is conveyed by the glossy qualities of a touristic gaze. If nostalgia is the “chief symptom” of a society that has forgotten how to “think historically,” then the reproduction of 70s nostalgia is the symptom of a society that can only view the 70s by watching and emulating the style of the movies from that era (1).

The celebration of all of these ‘bad’ images and sounds—ranging from disco, to punk, to serial killing, to drug running, to mafia control of Vegas—all express, to one degree or another, the desire to recapture a distinct moment of Americana, which is in the process of being lost in the face of globalization. In this sense, the celebration and nostalgia for the ‘bad’ is as important a token as remembering the good old days. Furthermore, the restaging of the 1970s within cinema marks a larger continuum of honouring a particularly vivid period of American cinema, as reflected in the films and filmmakers of the era. The “Baba O’ Riley” sequence, finally, is a demonstration of how Lee is able to synthesize music, images, and indeed, entire histories within a single scene. Part of his effectiveness as a director can be attributed to the presence of such sequences that blaze themselves into spectators’ memories, which is what makes films like *Do the Right Thing* (1989), *Girl 6* (1996), *He Got Game* (1998), and *The 25th Hour* (2002) so unforgettable. Such sequences are not only an expedient form of storytelling, they stand alone as discrete short films, condensing the larger context of the work into a potent few images.

Whether taken alone, viewed in relation to the movie as a whole, or contextualized within the larger framework of nostalgia for the 70s, the “Baba O’Riley” sequence, and the 70s sequence in general, is a vivid portrait of a bygone era that we all seek to recapture, for better or for worse.

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8. Interestingly enough, the film is better known as the 2nd ranked film on Wikipedia’s “List of Films that Most Frequently Use the Word ‘Fuck,’” featuring 400+ expressions of the word, for an average of 3.06 per minute in the 142 minute film.

Television, Live Transmission

Control and the Televised Performance Scene



Brian Fauteux

A performance scene is a critical component of the music biopic, establishing links between the past and present, and between viewers and their memories of a particular band or (more often than not deceased) artist. Performances—whether revered or criticized—highlight memorable moments of a musical career and can motivate and structure the narrative of a music biopic. Gary R. Edgerton cites television as an especially influential medium for delivering music performances to viewers, arguing that it has “transformed the way tens of millions of viewers think about historical figures and events” through

numerous nonfictional and fictional portrayals (1). This essay considers the televised performance of “Transmission” by Joy Division in Anton Corbijn’s *Control* (2007) to highlight the ways in which the performance scene, as a signature event in the band’s popular memory, bridges the past and present by integrating aspects of the original televised performances into contemporary popular culture. Moreover, the performance of “Transmission” marks a critical point in Joy Division’s career. The band generates attention and popularity through the exposure granted by the power of television—an increasingly prominent medium in the

promotion of popular music at the time of the original performances. Corbijn's representation of the "Transmission" performance advances both the represented and popular historic narrative of the band, illustrating the significant contribution of both television and film to the collective and popular history and memory of Joy Division.

Control recalls the life of the late Ian Curtis (Sam Riley), from his time as a young David Bowie fan and student in Macclesfield, England, to his years as the lead singer of Joy Division. The film ends with Curtis's suicide on May 18, 1980, succeeding emotional hardships stemming from his difficulties in balancing his marriage to Deborah Woodruff (Samantha Morton), and time spent on the road with his band and girlfriend, Annik Honoré (Alexandra Maria Lara). *Control* is Corbijn's first feature film, following a directorial career that includes many music videos, such as Nirvana's "Heart-Shaped Box" (1993), multiple videos for Depeche Mode (e.g. "Personal Jesus" in 1989 and "In Your Room" in 1994), and the video for Joy Division's "Atmosphere" (1988 reissue). Corbijn's relationship to Joy Division precedes his direction of "Atmosphere," as he photographed the band in the late 1970s. As Corbijn notes in a recent interview, "I had moved to England to be close to that music at the time, and I was very into Joy Division. I worked with them, took pictures of them that became synonymous with their music, and I was forever linked" (Tewksbury). The framing, composition and aesthetics of the places and spaces seen and heard in *Control* are often reflective of Corbijn's iconic black-and-white images from that time.

Corbijn's transition from photographing Joy Division to directing a feature film about the band is important to consider within the context of the music biopic. Certainly, Corbijn's extensive role as a shaper of Joy Division's mediated image factors into the way in which *Control's* aesthetics and narrative are represented. The high-contrast black and white scenes in *Control* recall this relationship between Corbijn and Joy Division—that of the mediator and the mediated—emphasizing the camera's place in representing, re-imagining, and transmitting music history. It seems fitting then, that Corbijn should choose to amalgamate two memorable live televised performances into his "Transmission" scene: the September 1978 performance of "Shadowplay" on Tony Wilson's *Granada Reports*, and the September 1979 performance of "Transmission," *Unknown Pleasure's* non-album single, on BBC2's *Something Else*. "Transmission" is the only full-length, complete performance in the film, recorded and played in actuality by Riley and the other actors who play the band.

Control's "Transmission" performance begins in similar fashion to the 1978 performance of "Shadowplay"

(with some slight differences in Wilson's introduction of the band). Riley, like Curtis, stands to the left of Craig Parkinson (playing Wilson), with his head bowed as the band is introduced: "Seeing as how this is the first television program which brought you the first appearances from everyone from The Beatles to The Buzzcocks, we like to think we bring you the most new and interesting sounds in the Northwest. They're called Joy Division..." The band of actors is positioned on individual cylindrical podiums (aside from the drummer, Harry Treadaway, playing Stephen Morris), just as Joy Division is on the original *Granada Reports* performance of "Shadowplay." After this introduction, the scene cuts to a shot of the performance framed by a television set in the Curtis family homes (that of Ian's parents' and of Ian and Deborah's), followed then by the performance of "Transmission," which, for the most part, mirrors the 1979 BBC2 performance. The iconic shots of Peter Hook with his Rickenbacker bass are recreated with actor Joe Anderson in Hook's place, and the low-angle shots from the original broadcast looking up at Bernard Sumner (James Anthony Pearson), who glares downward at his guitar neck while playing the song's riff, also make their way into Corbijn's representation of "Transmission." The performance effectively joins the most compelling parts from the original two broadcasts: that of Wilson's introduction of "Shadowplay," and the more proficient performance of "Transmission" that takes place later in the band's career. The result is a new performance scene that draws upon memorable moments from Joy Division's popular history.

The performance scene emphasizes the significance of certain televised media moments and performances in popular music history. Before Joy Division's *Granada Reports* performance, the Sex Pistols appeared on Bill Grundy's *Today* show in December of 1976—a quintessential performance in the popular history of the Sex Pistols, as it brought the band into the homes and minds of many English citizens in great part because of the swearing and heated exchange between the band and Grundy. From the perspective of John Lydon (better known as Johnny Rotten), Grundy "behaved like a filthy, dirty old man, and that's what came out in the interview. He more or less told us we were all filthy scum" (126). After Lydon and Steve Jones reacted to Grundy's behaviour, the exchange intensified. Lydon, commenting on the immense influence of the televised event, adds that the "Grundy show was absolutely the hinge. Before, the Pistols were just a group of annoying musical hacks" (181). Furthermore, such performance scenes, whether televised or not, are central to the historical music biopic and contemporary cinema's reimagining of such events, highlighting critical moments in the viewer's memory. Prominent examples include Joaquin Phoenix as Johnny Cash performing at Folsom Prison in *Walk the*

Line (James Mangold, 2005), and the performance of The Doors's "Light my Fire" on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, restaged in Oliver Stone's *The Doors* (1991). The Folsom prison performance is cited as both the "foundation of [Cash's] mid-career resurgence and the framing device for the 2005 biopic" (Deusner). The Doors's *Sullivan* appearance encapsulates Jim Morrison's controversial stage performances that would intensify over the years, as the band was asked to change the lyric "higher" to "better," but performed the original anyway.

Televised performance scenes can be thought of as iconic events, which, according to Patricia Leavy, are "signature events [that] occupy a special space within [a] culture, not necessarily because of their actual lived social significance, but based on the breadth of cultural meanings that come to be associated with them" (4). Although Leavy

d i s c u s s e s iconic events in relation to famous disasters or tragedies—Pearl Harbor and the sinking of the Titanic, for instance—much of her analysis can be applied to

the televised music performance. The ways in which iconic events are seen and heard in popular culture, according to Leavy, affects "the public's understanding of the event across generations [...] normalizing its national significance while renegotiating national identity" (26).¹ Leavy adds that films "are perhaps the primary source through which generations that did not live at the time of the event, come to learn about it" (26). Through Corbijn's representation of Joy Division's televised performance of "Transmission," audiences and fans (both those who remember the original televised performance and those who know Joy Division through *Control*) are exposed to a significant event contributing to the band's cultural legacy. The national (or cultural) significance of iconic events, as discussed by Leavy, may also illuminate aspects of the relationship between fandom and popular music performances. Corbijn's recreation of the "Transmission" performance employs a shared set of iconic stylistic devices with which fans identify, such as Curtis's signature dancing style, the aforementioned camera angles

mimicking the original performance, and the bass tones characteristic of many Joy Division songs. Linked through an interest in Joy Division's music, fans experience the represented performance as part of an imagined community; a shared interest in a particular genre or style of music connects them together across the boundaries of both time and space, encouraging cultural identification through their mutual experience of a signature event. Applying Benedict Anderson's concept of the imagined community to shared or popular memory, Geoffrey Cubitt ponders whether "communities that are imagined are communities not just of the living, but of the living with the dead and (by projection) the yet-to-be-born" (138). Thus, through the film, and more specifically the represented televised performance of "Transmission," links are established not only between old, new, and potential fans, but also between the past, present, and future. The 'presence' of the performance, then, has

the potential to transcend time.

The links between the past and present inherent in the re-imagined televised performance highlight both historical accuracy and inaccuracy, raising questions about the repackaging



of the televised music performance in popular culture (in this case, contemporary cinema). As Corbijn notes regarding *Control's* treatment of such performances, "I wanted to be very accurate with the Joy Division material, because that is documented. I thought it would be nice if it felt so real that you thought it was a documentary, if you started to believe that it's the real thing" (Tewksbury). Striving to recreate the performance with the greatest attention to detail, Corbijn uses similar instruments and clothes to those from the original performances, as well as comparable camera angles, framing, and movements of each band member. However, the fact that *Control's* "Transmission" is an amalgamation of two television broadcasts obviously thwarts this effort toward historical accuracy to some degree. As drummer Stephen Morris claimed after viewing the biopic, "None of it's true really...it's sort of true, but you have to take liberties when you're making a film because the truth is too boring" ("Joy Division"). Morris raises an important point that is worth expanding upon: the historical inaccuracy he speaks of is *probably* more representative of the tricky and selective nature of how shared memory tends to

1. For the purpose of this article, Leavy's use of *national* significance and identity could be replaced with *cultural* significance and identity.

recall such historical events, even when photographs, televised and filmed documents exist and remain readily accessible for comparison.

In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes argues that history “is constituted only if we look at it—and in order to look at it, we must be excluded from it.” Living souls, Barthes argues, are the very contrary of history (65). Corbijn, despite stressing that he would like the viewer to think *Control* is a documentary, is in actuality working from, and with, documents to retell a past story in the present—documents that include Deborah Curtis’s book, *Touching from a Distance* and love letters exchanged between Annik and Ian (“Annick” [*sic*]). As a living filmmaker reflecting on past events, Corbijn is temporally and subjectively distanced from the story of Joy Division in the late 1970s. His own history and subjectivities are unavoidably present in his film. For this reason (and for many other reasons), it is impossible to accurately retell

and represent each and every moment of Joy Division’s musicology. It is necessary to choose from the available documents, interpreting or reinterpreting them in such a way that forms

a persuasive aesthetic and narrative, reflecting the popular understanding of the band (Rodman 41). Leavy adds to this discourse, arguing that films, “as well as other commercial or popular interpretations, have the potential, at their best, to ignite a public discourse about the very conundrum on which *all* historical narratives are based” (180, emphasis in original). That is, historical film can expose “the irresolvable dual status of historical narratives, as document and fiction” (Anton Kaes qtd. in Leavy 180). While it is important to emphasize the inability of historical exactness to translate through popular culture, the significance of popular representations in film and television cannot be ignored. As an iconic event within a historical music biopic, the televised performance scene of “Transmission” can be considered among the dominant moments within the popular history of the band, marking a critical turning point in Joy Division’s career trajectory, as well as Curtis’s emotional and mental stability. The scene ultimately pushes forward the film’s narrative and foreshadows events to come. The televised performance is not, and cannot be, historically faithful to the original performances, but it can

be representative of the popular memory and history of the band. It is recognizable and identifiable as a Joy Division performance, and it can symbolize the effects the original performances had on the careers and lives of the band members—primarily Curtis.

The importance of the televised performance in relation to Joy Division’s career is evident both before and after the “Transmission” scene in *Control*, as it marks the beginning of the band’s transition from amateurs on the brink of success to a touring band with a manager, a record contract, and a trip to the United States on the horizon—a sentiment raised earlier by Lydon’s thoughts on the Grundy appearance. Tony Wilson, as a journalist and media personality with experience in establishing upcoming artists, is an authoritative figure for presenting the band to new audiences. As Leavy argues, newsmakers (or in this

case, a TV host) frame and give meaning to events, simply by reporting on and presenting them to audiences as something worth covering on television. Wilson legitimizes these determinedly



new and exciting sounds for an audience of TV viewers. In the film, Curtis is aware of Wilson’s ability to further the careers of bands, as he confronts Wilson in a bar, demanding that Joy Division perform on Wilson’s show. The importance of this performance is further emphasized through the anticipation reflected in the faces of Ian’s family and his wife, as they focus their attention on the TV sets that frame the band during the song’s driving bass intro. Including these reaction shots and the television set, Corbijn delivers the performance as part of a collective or popular memory/history, an important document that is critical to telling this particular story. Just as Wilson did in 1978, Corbijn presents his audience with a new performance worthy of their attention. The scene concludes with a close-up shot of a Factory Records contract signed dramatically in Tony Wilson’s blood, symbolizing in one image the visceral yet mythologized qualities that will surround the band’s cultural identity.

The “Transmission” performance scene is able to forward the narrative as an iconic event that collapses time and space, exerting new commercial pressures on Curtis and the

band, both in Joy Division's popular history and in Corbijn's contemporary representation. No longer is the band restricted to relatively local audiences, present only during live performances. Around the time of Joy Division's televised performances in the late 1970s and into the 1980s, television was undergoing "massive technological and institutional changes [...] becoming part of the transnational media industry and a global mediascape" (Hanke 60). Television was reaching new fans in new places, and the band was required to tour in order to reach these new fans and develop their career. Moreover, in a few short years following Joy Division's original televised performances, MTV was launched in August 1981, marking a distinct development in the role of television in the pop music industry. As Andrew Goodwin writes, the 1980s saw an "increasingly pervasive" promotion of popular music through a "television context" (xvi). According to Goodwin, music televi-

room for flailing arms, the scene foreshadows the darkness and dramatic events that follow this performance and mark the final years of Curtis's life. The scene cuts between close-up shots of Riley's face, hands held tightly on the microphone with his bright wedding ring as a focal point, and shots that frame his whole body, while he moves and dances like Curtis with hands in motion. The conflict and confusion of Curtis's life that becomes the focus of much of the remainder of the film is firmly established in this scene, reflected in Morton's facial expression at the end of the song as she stares at the television, anxious and troubled. Later in the film, Curtis earnestly reflects on the transition from the band while recording and touring for *Unknown Pleasures* (including the "Transmission" performance), and the time following the release of *Closer* (1980)—a time during which Curtis suffered multiple epileptic seizures and attempted suicide. As he is driven away from the hospital,

Staying in the same place / Just staying out the time Touching from a distance / Further all the time

sion represents "both the blurring of two hitherto separate (indeed, sometimes hostile) media and a new hybrid of programming and promotion that mixes media and genres at the level of the text" (25). "Transmission" appropriately emphasizes the transformative role of television within the music industry; however, it does so in a way that hints at Curtis's inability to later cope with the band's success. The lyrics "Staying in the same place, just staying out the time/ Touching from a distance/ Further all the time" reflect the capacity for music television and music videos to distribute and promote music nationally and internationally, reaching or 'touching' viewers from a distance. Yet the chorus, "Dance, dance, dance, dance, dance, to the radio" presents a strong contrast to the act of sitting and watching television, which is visually reinforced by Curtis dancing and running on the spot. The scene positions television as a powerful medium for transmitting an artist into the homes of countless viewers, while simultaneously foreshadowing Curtis's apprehension and personal difficulties with increasing popularity and fame.

Both the consequent increase in pressure and Joy Division's commercial success compound the tensions that trouble Curtis, such as the polarity between a localized family life and the travel commitments of a band on the rise. As Riley loses control during the build up of "Transmission," channeling Curtis's signature hypnotic dance and tossing aside the microphone stand to make

he says: "I don't want to be in the band anymore. *Unknown Pleasures* was it. I was happy. I never meant for it to grow like this... I have no control anymore." The band's success has grown beyond Curtis's control due in part to the wide reception of this nationally televised performance of "Transmission."

Corbijn's representation of the two original television performances not only demonstrates how the televised performance was central to taking Joy Division from a fairly local, borderline-popular band to the point of national (and international) recognition, but it also repackages the iconic televised performance for a contemporary film audience. As Leavy argues, "it is in the commercial realm of films, books, and products that we can see most clearly how collective memory is revised over time to reflect contemporary needs and understandings" (27). The representation of the two original performances can reflect the expectations of contemporary music fans who have grown up with stylized music videos on MTV, and who currently live in a visually-dominant culture. Despite their originality or 'authenticity', the original televised performances of the band appear stylistically dated with production values that are of noticeably lower quality when compared to contemporary standards for audio-visual representations of music. Moreover, technological and stylistic standards are not the only aspects of popular culture subject to change. Historical meaning and perceptions of history also "evolve over time, reflecting among other things, the extent to which our rela-

tion to the past is conditioned by present circumstances” (Anderson 20). Corbijn, with relevant experience as a music video director and mediator of Joy Division’s iconography, is able to repack these original performances into an updated performance of “Transmission” that is reflective of the aesthetic quality and technical capacity of contemporary popular cinema and music.

Analyses that focus on the representation and role of historical moments within contemporary popular culture are frequently associated with modern capitalism and the commodification of history. Cubitt, for instance, argues that “the logic of market capitalism,” which can be applied, in this case, to the circulation of a popular film, “turns references to the past into items whose circulation and exchange is no longer restricted by any need to relate them to the actual contexts of experience” (246). A number of these arguments are skeptical of the relationship between television and history. Fredric Jameson associates visual media with forgetfulness in postmodern culture, arguing that “TV and other visual media have fostered an increasingly ‘derealized sense of presence, identity, and history”” (qtd. in Anderson 19). Others, such as Alison Landsberg, conceive of a ‘prosthetic memory’ that contemporary popular culture generates through repackaging memories and images from the past. Landsberg argues that “commodification enables memories and images of the past to circulate on a grand scale [...enabling] the transmission of memories to people who have no ‘natural’ or biological claims to them” (qtd. in Cubitt 247-8). The televised performance scene collapses temporal and spatial boundaries by exposing new fans to an original performance from another time and place, and through the use of contemporary technologies that allow the performance to mimic the aural and visual quality standards and stylistic codes of the present. The original televised performances brought Joy Division into the homes of music fans with the sense of import and legitimacy associated with Tony Wilson, BBC2, and the medium of television itself at the time. Corbijn’s contemporary representation of Joy Division places the band in the realm of contemporary popular culture through the medium of film. The audience sees and hears actors, but the legacy of the band is recalled through the televised performance scene.

Film and television have the capacity “to make a unique contribution to historical discourse because they allow viewers to recover the ‘liveliness’ and richness of the past—to see and feel what it must have been like to be a part of history” (Anderson 24). The “Transmission” scene in *Control* recalls the ‘liveliness’ and ‘richness’ of the past, placing memorable moments within the context of contemporary cinema. The restaged scene depicts the

excitement and the apprehension generated by the televised performance, highlighting, also, the ways in which small details in performance become etched in popular memory, and this is a large part of what the film is about. It is therefore relevant not only to consider the popular history/memory of a band as generated by themselves, but also the role of mediators (such as filmmakers and photographers), as well as the audiences and fans who receive and reflect upon the various representations that are manifest in popular culture—the living groups and individuals who both shape and are shaped by cultural and technological developments. Despite unavoidable deviations from the original performances, Corbijn’s “Transmission” scene extends the popular memory and history of the band, proving that performance scenes in music biopics are not only important sites of study, but significant ‘transmissions’ of popular history in and of themselves.

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The Spies Who Came In from the Cold

Framing Alfred Hitchcock's *Torn Curtain*



Murray Pomerance

An undervalued and understudied film at best, Alfred Hitchcock's *Torn Curtain* (1966) has gained its relatively small popular reputation largely on the basis of Paul Newman and Julie Andrews's presence as (according to some dissatisfied reviewers, incompetent) star performers, and has attracted marginal scholarly attention as a 'cold war' story about American espionage, or pursuit, in Communist East Germany. Robin Wood, for example, sees it as a descent narrative, in which the hero, made vulnerable to dangers, sees "the need to commit himself completely to a woman" (200). Christopher Morris sees the film as an "allegory of the pursuit of the sign" (62). But film criticism and scholarship remain largely inoculated

against serious considerations of dramaturgy and image construction, still fervently focused on the rather literary conceit of analyzing story content or language for its own sake—as metaphor, as mirror, or as evidence of an author's obsession. The magnitude of Hitchcock's genius has therefore been persistently overlooked, even by people who rave about him as a master. As William Rothman cannily suggests, "Part of what [Hitchcock] knew when he died is that America really never understood his films" (343).

In this film, Michael Armstrong (Newman), a senior professor of physics at some unspecified American college, and his graduate assistant Sarah Sherman (Andrews), find themselves at the University of Leipzig, where Armstrong,

having defected to the Communist East Bloc, is apparently collaborating with the internationally acclaimed theorist Gustav Lindt (Ludwig Donath) on a secret rocket formula called “Gamma-5.” The defection and collaboration constitute a mask, however, since Armstrong is ‘in fact’ an agent of the Central Intelligence Agency, working against the clock to extract the vital formula from Lindt in order that the American military program might be saved from fail-

peers—who are all traveling to Copenhagen for the International Conference of Physicists. For some unannounced reason, the heating system on this vessel has spectacularly failed, with the temperature on board plummeting to the freezing point, resulting in a set of conditions which daunt the courage of civilized (that is, highly educated and purportedly well socialized) mankind: gelid water in the drinking glasses at lunch, frozen energies and appetites, viscous

The cold ship is a convenient locale for establishing the two central lovers in a position that is at once compromising and deeply informative.

ure. Sherman, at first humiliated and revolted by her lover’s apparent treachery, falls even more deeply in love with him than ever when she discovers what he is ‘really’ trying to do. By the film’s end, the two are racing against German security forces to escape the country alive.

Woven throughout this ostensibly straightforward story, which I have dissected far more patiently in *An Eye for Hitchcock*, are numerous visual ‘motifs’ or ‘themes’, which many who write about this film take as decorative or metaphorical expressions of underlying meanings. A principal one of these is fire: the flame of Lindt’s cigar, the pathetic security guard Gromek’s (Wolfgang Kieling), faulty lighter that will not take flame no matter how hard he tries, the ‘flame’ of Armstrong’s intelligence and his love for Sarah, the ‘fire’ simulated onstage by a visiting Soviet ballet company en route to Sweden but giving a final performance in East Germany—with Armstrong and Sherman trapped in the audience—of Tchaikovsky’s “Francesca da Rimini,” the word “Fire!” screamed out by Armstrong from the midst of that audience as a way of creating the pandemonium through which he and his assistant will be able to escape, the fiery red hair of the ballet company’s stage manager, who helps in the escape, and so on.

I want to focus on two particularly elaborate manifestations of this trope, which function together as a framing system for the film (since one comes at the beginning and the other at the end), in such a way as to set the stage for a question which I believe may be notably revealing about what *Torn Curtain* finally intends. In the opening sequence, we are aboard the M.S. Meteor, a touring vessel in the Norwegian *Osterfjord*, along with numerous academics—Dr. Walter Keller of Princeton University and dozens of his

movement and corresponding antipathy, chilly conversational climate, and an overwhelmingly incessant sense that physical and emotional warmth are out of the question, at the furthest remove, gone forever. These qualities of experience and condition are exemplified and magnified by a scenic design that for the most part favours cool greens and blues (mixed, as were all the paints used for the sets of the film, with gray [Henry Bumstead, personal communication]), a lighting strategy that employs arc lamps for simulated daylight (rather than warming tungsten), and a camera style that frames stationary shots, intercut rather like photographs in a magazine documentary or bureaucratic slide show—as though the conscious camera itself has been slowed to a halt by the pervasive cold.

When the conference migrates to the Hotel d’Angleterre in Copenhagen, things are immediately very different. Scholars are warm and even bubbly to one another, there is considerable movement of both persons and the frame, the woodier décor is brown-and golden-toned (thus, distinctly warmer), and the protagonists seem possessed of genuine motive and energy. Further, however, the chill of the sequence on the ship goes entirely unreferenced. The narrative does not look back from its presence in a warm climate to the unforgiving cold, either here or at any future point in the film.

The cold ship is a convenient locale for establishing the two central lovers in a position that is at once compromising and deeply informative. Michael and Sarah have invented their own ideal solution to the temperature crisis, and are discovered by the camera wrapped together in bed, under a pile of huge blankets. While their patter signals

the audience about what they do professionally; what their relationship is to one another; and how, with respect to the binding commitment of matrimony, dominating Michael and infatuated Sarah do not precisely share views (“Breakfast comes before lunch,” says she, “and marriage should come before a honeymoon cruise,” to which he ripostes, “You’re on the wrong ship”—this in entertaining conformity to contemporary playful cinematic appraisals of bourgeois values in the early 1960s, such as, for example, Michael Gordon’s *Pillow Talk* [1959]). The physical depiction of the two physicists in bed with one another, not merely ‘warming up’ because the heat is off, but also actually warming up (erotically), suggests something about their basic attitudes toward the body and its social envelope. At the beginning

George Fox, the Quaker [...] to whom, as a matter of fact, was even given the magic internal heat—“The fire of the Lord was so in my feet, and all around me, that I did not matter to put on my shoes any more” (6). Here, at any rate, was an ample supply of the kind of Eastern philosophy that titillated audiences, academic and not, in the early days of the 1960s, a locus of fascinations such as Michael and his ardent protégée could well have enjoyed. It was an era in which excursions into, and refinements of the self were taken as culturally valid, even paramount.

What seems central to me about the episode with the blankets, then, is its clear signal that Michael and Sarah, perhaps each in a different way, ‘has it’. They are self-reliantly brilliant, moving ahead in their own careers, purposive, ca-

At the beginning of *Torn Curtain*, Michael and Sarah are each convinced of the self as a container of a thermal core, some essential inner essence that has the capacity to store and radiate energy or purpose.

of *Torn Curtain*, Michael and Sarah are each convinced of the self as container of a thermal core, some essential inner essence that has the capacity to store and radiate energy or purpose. Each person is a fire, in other words, and can exclude sufficient heat to warm a colleague beneath a blanket. The function of that blanket is to trap and isolate the therapeutic substance that is naturally, spontaneously exuded by one’s self and one’s friend. A more general way to see this is that motive and cause come from the wells of the self.

Not long before this film was released, the classicist Norman O. Brown had given a Phi Beta Kappa talk at Columbia University, and soon later published in *Harpers*, the blazing essay, “Apocalypse: The Place of Mystery in the Life of the Mind,” in which he quoted the specifications for the final examination in the course on Internal Heat at the College of Magic Ritual in Tibet:

Candidates assemble naked, in midwinter, at night, on a frozen Himalayan lake. Beside each one is placed a pile of wet frozen undershirts: the assignment is to wear, until they are dry, as many as possible of these undershirts before dawn. Where the power is real, the test is real, and the grading system dumbfoundingly objective. (5)

“The power I look for,” said Brown, “is the power of enthusiasm: as condemned by John Locke; as possessed by

pable, sophisticated, and endowed, *in themselves*, with the powers of extension, recuperation, drive, navigation, reflection, and so on. So it is that—as yet innocent of his deeper motives—we soon accept Michael’s defection to the East as motivated by his (perhaps questionable) personal desires and alignments, and that we come to understand Sarah’s seeing it this way, too. So it is that even when Michael confides to Sarah that he is on a mission (thus seducing her love and loyalty forever), it can seem to us (and, of course, to her) that his actions are the plain result of an exercise of will on his part. What he does, therefore, indicates what he intends. And climactically, Michael’s deft little exercise with Lindt in the professor’s basement *lesekturverein*, that holy sanctuary of which the door may remain unlocked because nobody who walks in can understand the formulae they read there, can seem, all through its progress and in its explosive conclusion as Lindt betrays his formula to the foreign stranger who had been masquerading as a hungry student, to be Michael’s personal triumph. Michael’s performing skills (put up, brilliantly here, by Paul Newman’s performing skills), Michael’s sharp intelligence and quick reaction, Michael’s avowed democratic purpose and American patriotism, in short, Michael himself is the force that draws the ‘truth’ from its secret vault in Lindt’s defensive brain. As Michael warms Sarah, as Michael from within his embodied person draws up the energies and focus to rectify

the heating problem on the ship, so later on Michael with his powers mobilizes the events that comprise the plot, and Michael with his powers (assisted most capably by Sarah, with hers) brings about the happy ending.

It is easy enough to read self-reliance, will, and the motivated personality as sources of action, all through the film. To jump a little: the star ballerina in that culminating performance (Tamara Toumanova) is a card-carrying Communist who wants to catch the fleeing “*Amerikanische spionen*” who are buried in some of the costume baskets on the freighter *Westgall* that she and the company are taking to Sweden; when she thinks she has seen them, and calls out for the officers on board to shoot (which they do), it is out of personal motive, we may think, or political sensibility turned personal, that she acts. She is hateful, vengeful, in-

particles or delight in the ravenous graduate students seeking nourishment from his scintillations of wisdom. Lindt, like Armstrong, is thus self-motivated. The utterly pathetic Countess Kuchinska (Lila Kedrova), who accidentally runs into the fleeing Sarah and Michael and agrees to help them get out of Germany if they will but sponsor her to the United States of America, acts as she does not because of the press of social forces and pumped up expectations that play upon her, given her residual class status, but because she is obsessively driven, one could say insanely focused on the American dream.

At the end of the film, we find Michael and Sarah blancketed once more, but in a wholly different situation. Having safely jumped the freighter in the Swedish harbour, the two now emerge sopping wet in front of welcoming Swedish authorities, who immediately usher them into a little cabin

Hitchcock was no decorator, and these framing sequences were not frivolous additions to a relatively insignificant film.

deed filled with spite; and much earlier, when Armstrong’s plane landed him in East Berlin, we learned why: she was in a seat near to his, but as she stepped onto the gangway, and posed dramatically for the bevy of hungry photographers, it was the defecting American they turned out to be waiting for, not her, and, diva that she was, the ballerina was reduced on the spot to the humiliating lowliness of an utter nobody. The cheery thug Gromek attempts to bond with Armstrong, we may imagine, not because he is a flunkie of the East German security service who must do what he is told, but because he desires to make the American’s acquaintance, since with Armstrong he can perhaps reminisce about Pete’s Pizza at 88th and 8th in New York, where once he was happy. The mad professor Lindt has been working zealously on his “Gamma-5” formula not, apparently, because he occupies a structured role in a state-controlled bureaucracy but out of a more personal motive, pure fascination for micro-



and provide them with a bonfire. The film ends as we share the perspective of a particularly eager press photographer who wants just one (last) picture, and who has climbed up so that he can watch them through a transom. When they notice him, Michael and Sarah draw their gray woolen blankets together to make a screen which will block his (and our) view. But as the two spies are huddled together, cold and wet in front of a fireplace, it is the crackling flames that are giving them succour, the objective outside source, not a well of internal heat. In one sense the culmination of the so-called ‘fire motif’, then, this scene also closes the film by suggesting one particular, even provocative, additional fire that contributes to the plot.

And this question must be asked: given that, as popular reception would have it, *Torn Curtain* is about espionage and intelligence, or that it is about love; given that the relationship between Michael and Sarah is established suc-

cinctly while they are in Copenhagen and then developed beautifully when he ‘defects’ (and she follows him) to East Berlin; given that their passion for one another is perfectly evident in its many stages in Denmark, in Germany, and then on the dock in Sweden; given that we may watch their actual espionage from an admirable (indeed, from an ideal) viewpoint; and given that our spies get away successfully; why is it necessary for Hitchcock to bracket, or frame it all with two sequences involving, of all things, the production of heat? (Why do we need the chilly ship at all?) In the first, with shivers all around them, our lovers demonstrate ‘internal heat’. In the second, when they are no longer warm themselves but shivering, they are offered the benefits of a bonfire. Whether or not we find the ‘flame’ theme important as a heuristic figure, surely it is developed sufficiently throughout the film not to require these two bracketing scenes, which do no more than demonstrate the protagonists’ caloric relation to the world. That is: without Michael and Sarah either ‘being hot’ or ‘needing heat’, we can see a story ‘heating up’ and even ‘reaching its boiling point’ without the parenthetical system Hitchcock has put in place. I think a serious reflection on the finale might help us see—if still, in the wake of the considerable scholarship about him, we need to see—how Hitchcock was no decorator, and how these framing sequences were not frivolous additions to a relatively insignificant film.

What Michael and Sarah learn and demonstrate, simultaneously, in the finale is exactly that motive does not come from will at all, or, to speak by way of the metaphor of ‘fire’, heat is not—or not simply—internal. Just as Lindt’s brilliance is a response to state dictatorship; and as Countess Kuchinska’s urgency is a response to the abjectness of her living conditions (and also to her expectations); and as Gromek’s interest in Michael comes at least in part from his boredom with his job, not just Michael’s attractiveness; so, here, Michael and Sarah are shown to be finally, existentially, incomplete, which is to say, not the perfect heroes at all. They must rely on what is outside them for help. They must escape the arrogance of their



own ego positions and accept that life is complex business involving relations with, help from, and negotiation against others. Indeed, to bring this point home Hitchcock shows clearly that Michael and Sarah are couched inside *separate blankets* (and separate blankets hardly because the tolerant Swedish authorities have been prurient with this rather obvious twosome that has been born, dripping, from their harbour). The narcissistic dream of incorporation which helped fuel their earlier tryst has evaporated in the torn light of political contingency and danger. It is not merely that Michael must find the help of a woman, as Wood has it, but that he must recognize she is not al-

ready his creation, not already within himself. The future for each of these persons, after this moment of spectacular growth, will be more problematic still, and also more exciting: they will have moved from projectors to contractors, from expecting a world that conforms to their inner desires to recognizing an otherness that must be approached, reached out to, touched.

In much the same way, by 1966, with the Cuban missile crisis and the Bay of Pigs all untidily resolved, with a dead President in its wake, America in general had lost its sheen of individualistic self-assured glory and gained entrance to a global culture where connections and advantages had to be argued for, relations had to be built, intelligence, to be truly bright, had to be shared, and warmth had to come from beyond one’s skin.

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In the Bathhouse

Collective Violence and Eastern Promises

Jessica Hughes

Although you may never have seen *Eastern Promises* (David Cronenberg, 2007) in its entirety, chances are you have seen the film's bathhouse scene. Following its premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival, most of the attention directed at *Eastern Promises* was in response to the full frontal nudity and graphic violence of the film's knife fight, which Roger Ebert suggested would become a benchmark for future fight scenes, comparing it to the standard *The French Connection* (William Friedkin, 1971) set for chase sequences (par. 7). While one caption for the scene posted on YouTube makes reference to Viggo Mortensen attending to his "call of duty" as an actor by shooting the entire fight sequence naked ("Eastern"), others simply warn about the "strong brutal and bloody violence," drawing more attention to the sheer explicitness of the scene than anything else ("NUDE"). The reason the bathhouse scene is so powerful, however, has less to do with special effects or extraneous bloodshed and more to do with the impact of violence on the body in establishing the autonomy of the individual. Cronenberg portrays the heroic individual as a moral being, who offers his vulnerable naked body as proof of his loyalty to Scotland Yard. The bathhouse scene radically confronts the overwhelming

'we' that is set up in the prior scenes, re-examining the degree to which an individual is defined by his relationship with the group.

This concept is interrogated in Alain Badiou's 2005 book *The Century*, where he examines how acts of violence are particularly significant to structured groups of people. Considering cruelty as one of the most defining aspects of the twentieth century, Badiou evaluates the effect of collective cruelty on both the perpetrators and the victim. Rather than individually dealing with conflict, hostile acts are executed by large numbers of people because it is unlikely that, in placing the blame, an individual will be singled out of an entire group. Using an excerpt from Bertolt Brecht's *The Decision*, Badiou examines how the Communist Party relies on the absolute devotion of the members to the group. Brecht's play focuses on a band of Communist militants awaiting their opportunity to organize the workers in pre-Communist China. When one of the young members insists (prematurely) that the Party take action, he puts their lives and mission in jeopardy. Thus he is forced to sacrifice not only his membership in the group, but also his own life. Badiou's reading of this focuses on the union of the individual and the collective, using the terms 'I' and 'we'

to draw attention to the way the two work together rather than functioning in and of themselves. It is vital that the young Comrade in *The Decision* express his 'I' in terms of a radical commitment to the Idea, but it is equally vital that the 'we' act cohesively. He cannot be an individual without defining himself by his relationship to the group, but, at the same time, he is unable to be a member of the group without considering its effect on him as a single entity. The Real—as horrifically expressed by the Comrades slaying the young man and throwing his body face-down into a pit of lime—is the tragic and 'cruel' cost effected on the individual in service of a higher principle. In this case, the Idea is less about Communism than the radical commitment of the collective, whose passion for the Real will tolerate terrible and spectacular acts of cruelty; the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few.

In *Eastern Promises*, Nikolai (Viggo Mortensen) is similarly caught between the 'I' and the 'we' in his relation-



ship with both Scotland Yard and the Russian mafia. Both groups offer a sense of belonging that is Nikolai's reality, making him unable to exist as an individual without also being part of the group. But, the maintenance of the 'I' within the inseparable 'we' calls attention to Badiou's representation of the collective as a contradictory relationship between the group and the individual: "The demand of the 'we' [...] appears as a demand for inseparateness." Rather than insisting on a complete transformation of the 'I' into the 'we', Badiou suggests it is more important for "the 'I' to abide within the 'we' in an inseparable form" so as to highlight the individual's existence within the group (122). In accordance with this, rather than wholly submitting himself to either group, Nikolai maintains his sense of 'I' as a part of the 'we' in order to reinforce his role as a supporter of the greater Idea. Just as the relationship between the young Comrade and the Communist Party suggests in *The Decision*, the obligation for a permanent bond between members of the *vory v zakone* in *Eastern Promises* is so strong that if one were to expose himself as an outsider, it would be necessary to eliminate that person altogether. With this in

mind, Nikolai takes advantage of the conformity expected from members of the mob and works his way to the top by means of forged loyalty.

The film opens with a murder arranged by Kirill (Vincent Cassel), the son of a Russian mafia leader in London, Semyon (Armin Mueller-Stahl). To dispose of the bloody corpse, Kirill calls in Nikolai, whom we learn is both Kirill's driver and 'undertaker'. Later in the film, however, when Nikolai is shown relaying his life story to the senior members of the *vory v zakone* (literally, "thieves by the code"), it becomes clear that he is a greater asset to Semyon's family. His interview with the head members of the gang is followed by the tattooing of three stars on his body: two on either side of his heart and one on his knee. These stars signify his acceptance into the family, a decision based on his perceived devotion to the group as well as his criminal past—as illustrated by the array of Siberian pris-



on tattoos already adorning his body. After he passes this physical examination, Nikolai is elevated to the same status as Kirill within the hierarchy of the mob family. However, this promotion turns out to be a ploy arranged by Semyon to save his son's reputation. Two scenes later, Nikolai meets Azim (Mina E. Mina), a member from a rival faction, at the local bathhouse, for a meeting arranged by both the family that has taken him in and the rival Chechen family, who believe he is Kirill. Leaving Nikolai in the bathhouse, Azim tells two other men that 'Kirill' is waiting for them and they will recognize him by his *vory v zakone* tattoos. The two men enter the steam room and brutally attack Nikolai, who, naked and unarmed, appears completely vulnerable, though his self-defense skills quickly counter this impression.

The details of this scene draw attention to the way *Eastern Promises* portrays the relationship between appearance, truth, and the figure of the Real. The preceding scenes suggest Nikolai is accepted into the family because they value his dedication, but the bathhouse scene proves otherwise. The reliance on group membership is emphasized

here by the fact that, in a group with distinctive traits, such as the tattoos of the Russian mafia, members are distinguishable by their ranking, rather than as individuals. Thus, Nikolai can easily be mistaken for Kirill because they have the same markings on their bodies, which declare not only their membership and position in the group but also their absolute loyalty. Semyon exploits this loyalty to the collective in order to maintain control—without the cooperation of the members, he would be unable to uphold his rule.

Although having the appropriate tattoos confirms Nikolai's acceptance within the *vory v zakone*, it is also what betrays him to the attackers. The Real is presented here as the result of preconceived expectations of defining characteristics associated with groups rather than individuals. Nikolai's connection to Kirill as a friend, brother, and guardian is enough to make him pass as the real Kirill, regardless of any other facts that might suggest otherwise. The film offers very little confirmed background informa-

vidual. Rather than devoting himself entirely to one group, Nikolai pledges his allegiance to both the *vory v zakone* and Scotland Yard by offering portions of his individuality to each. In the process, however, he is forced to come to terms with the cruelty he has become tied to by association. In his study of how violent acts are influenced by other people and events, historian and philosopher Rene Girard observes: "[m]en cannot confront the naked truth of their own violence without the risk of abandoning themselves to it entirely" (87). Rather than openly accepting our roles as individuals, Girard suggests that it is easier to attribute our violent tendencies to some kind of collective bond by joining forces with other individuals who are likely to issue the same kind of reactions. This allows us to incorporate cruelty into our lives without accepting personal responsibility for it. The violence Nikolai partakes in is similarly justified by his ties to a greater cause—Scotland Yard's effort to reduce crime by bringing down the Russian mob.



tion about Nikolai prior to the knife fight, so having the tattoos, and the consequential cuts on his body, confirm his association with Kirill and Semyon. Paradoxically, the ensuing gashes and bruises inflicted on Nikolai's body satisfy a Badiouian passion for the Real, which convinces all parties, and the audience as well, of a loyalty paid for in blood. It is significant that the revelation that Nikolai is working for Scotland Yard succeeds the bathhouse scene, emphasizing how he has consciously risked his safety as an individual for the benefit of the group. In this sense, the damage done to the body is ultimately the cost of belonging to a collective and Nikolai is presented as the heroic figure. The passion for the Real is here expressed by the graphic violence of the bathhouse scene. Simultaneously, the scene forces the viewers to consider the implications of Nikolai's naked and tattooed body—which at once marks him as part of a group, while, at the same time, renders him vulnerable and exposed, an individual struggling for his own survival.

While the power of the collective is emphasized here, on a deeper level it also reveals how being a member of a group can be used to advance one's position as an indi-

Complications arise, however, with the realization that the Russian mob is comprised of smaller factions, each with their own causes. The relationship between the two groups belonging to the *vory v zakone* is therefore defined by their collective interactions, rather than individual ones, with the battle for power prevailing beyond any common causes that may exist otherwise. Although it is Kirill who specifically calls for the death of a Chechen man, other members of the group, by affiliation, take part in the murder, and all are subject to the repercussions. Kirill's dependence on collective support ties him to the other members of the *vory v zakone* who defend him, which brings us back to the bathhouse scene, where the bloody consequence of his murder in the name of the 'we' gets directly thrust upon the naked and unsuspecting 'I'. As Nikolai sits alone, waiting for Azim to return, two men in suits approach him. Seconds later, the first attack is made, and, throughout the rest of the scene, the camera remains tightly focused on Nikolai's naked body, with close attention to the slashes made in his skin, followed by his quick and powerful reactions. The bloody close-ups of his defense continue for

close to three minutes before he is able to defeat the Chechens and escape from the bathhouse. The next scene cuts to a wounded Nikolai, alone, being pushed through a corridor on a hospital bed.

The separation between the collective violence portrayed in the film prior to the bathhouse scene and the focus on the individual that scarcely comes into play earlier on is very much defined by these attacks. One of the key contradictions of the Russian mafia in this film is that the violence directed toward Nikolai in the bathhouse scene shows he has only been accepted as a part of the group so they can eliminate him in place of another, more valuable, member. Rather than lose Kirill, who has invested himself in the group, Semyon chooses to sacrifice the newcomer, whose ties are less secure. As a result, Nikolai is subjected to twice the violence because he is simultaneously an insider and an outsider. While this reinforces his assumed identity, so he can maintain his sense of 'I' while still being a part of the group, it is not clear at this point in the film how this is advantageous to him. However, the transition between the bathhouse scene and the subsequent revelation shows how Nikolai has studied the roles he must play in order to be a member of Scotland Yard and the *vory v zakone*, by allowing his 'I' to become a part of the inseparable 'we'. Similarly, Kirill's attempt to play the role of a mafia leader's son, by killing other members of the group to prove his own power and using prostitutes to maintain some facade of heterosexuality, emphasizes the significance of using the 'we' to preserve an assumed image of the 'I'.

The significance of role playing and identity is at the forefront of *Eastern Promise's* key themes because of the emphasis on its characters as immigrants to the United Kingdom. Cronenberg investigates the importance of group membership for the Russians in various ways, not only through the portrayal of the *vory v zakone*, but also with the story of Anna (Naomi Watts) and her family, as well as the narration of Tatiana's (Tatiana Maslany) journal, which plays a significant role in the film's examination of the outsider's quest for belonging. Although Anna was born in London, she attempts to relate to her Russian heritage by getting involved in the mystery of Tatiana and her baby. This connection is essential for understanding how group violence occurs in different classes and social enclaves. In addition to Tatiana's association with the *vory v zakone's* illegal business of importing Russian women to London for the sex trade, Anna's visits to Semyon's house reflect her desire to be included in the group of Russian expatriates of which she believes he is a part. Further, the appeal of being a member of a group associated with a given cultural circle is what brings the *vory v zakone* together within the film. The 'we' provided by the collective support of joining

together is particularly attractive to this circle because most members have already given up their individuality in their struggle to fit in, even as outsiders. Yet, the constant unease felt by those caught between the 'I' and the 'we', leads to a form of violence echoing Badiou's proposal that "[t]he idea that the only real body is the tortured body, the body dismembered by the real, is a terrifying but ancient one." By committing crime as a collective, they are able to accept the reality of their lives in London, with faith in the fact that "the wound is what testifies to the body's exposure to the real," providing this desired sense of belonging (116). The stab wounds Nikolai receives in the knife fight with the Chechens confirm his relationship with the Russian mafia and his existence as an expatriate in London.

Eastern Promises offers a closer look at the purpose of this reliance on the collective by reconsidering the individual intentions of group members. The film examines family relations in an inter-cultural context, while ultimately suggesting that neither familial nor cultural ties are a means to an end when it comes to improving one's status. The context of the Russians and Chechens living in London draws attention to the immigrant experience and the necessity for belonging, which also offers significant insight into the search for identity connected to the desire to be part of a group. Yet, it is through the aggressive turn of events in the bathhouse scene that Cronenberg is able to more directly explore the relationship between group members, where neither fraternal relations nor sworn oaths seem to hold any value. By temporarily dislocating the audience's sense of family values and trust, Cronenberg draws attention to the way groups of people join together to carry out acts of violence in service of upholding the collective. In the end, though Nikolai is able to reclaim his 'I' from both the *vory v zakone* and Scotland Yard, the film encourages the viewer to consider how, in support of an Idea, we must not only offer our individuality, but our Real flesh and blood.

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That There Corpse Is Startin' to Turn!

Three Burials and the Post-Mortem Western



Brent Strang

The Western is dead and ripe for necrophilic love. However, if filmmakers are going to risk this taboo, they had better avoid getting infected with the illness that killed the genre in the first place: the jingoistic celebration of Anglo-Saxon, male hegemony. Yet there is currency in hauling out the carcass for display, like the upright coffins of the Old West to be gawked at with grisly veneration. For as many filmmakers, critics, and spectators recoiling at its reactionary connotations, there are as many still transfixed by the Western's nostalgic iconography, its codes of honour and courage, and its tendentious Frontier Myth. As a less commercially viable boutique genre,

the contemporary Western specializes in revisionism—its stigma is its most exploitable asset. Though it appears counter-intuitive at the outset, we might actually consider the contemporary Western the most 'modern' of today's cinematic genres, its poisoned remains so readily available for self-autopsy. Themes of regeneration through violence, compulsive masculinity, and white heterosexual patriarchy are still wafting from our cultural stew; they are scarcely less formative to American national identity than in the 'good old days' in which they arose.

A fair portion of post-1990 Westerns present counter-histories, following the revisionist trend set in the 60s

and 70s. We see, for example an expanded, yet still contentious, canvas of representation for Native-Americans in *Dances With Wolves* (Kevin Costner, 1990) and *Geronimo: An American Legend* (Walter Hill, 1993), as well as for African Americans in *Posse* (Mario Van Peebles, 1993) and LGBT people in *The Ballad of Little Jo* (Maggie Greenwald, 1993) and *Brokeback Mountain* (Ang Lee, 2005). In another stream, films such as *Unforgiven* (Clint Eastwood, 1992), *No Country for Old Men* (Coen Bros., 2007) and *The Assassination of Jesse James* (Andrew Dominik, 2007) interrogate the complexities of violence and masculinity not only by exploiting the power of conventional tropes, but by exposing their deficiencies as well. Like Comolli and Narboni's category E films, they stand as veiled critiques of longstanding assumptions within the dominant ideology, contentiously blurring the line between reprovng and enabling (687).

The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada (Tommy Lee Jones, 2005) situates itself amongst this mire of ideological ambivalence. The scene I have selected for this study captures the conflicted sensibilities we have about the Western nowadays, revered on the one hand as a cherished lost object and scorned on the other as a retrograde holdover. The film espouses these competing perspectives and ends up re-mythologizing as much as it demythologizes; it redeems an ethical masculine subject formation even as it unveils the latently violent and asocial tendencies intrinsic to American Exceptionalism. Some, who strictly define the genre as set in post-bellum America (see Kitses 57; Wright 5-6; Durgnat & Simmon 69), may wonder if it's a Western at all, but I won't belabour this point here. Suffice it to say, *Three Burials* is part of a cycle of films that I term 'Post-Mortem' Westerns, whose standard Western icons and tropes deployed in a modern day setting reinforce the genre's outmodedness while enhancing the genre's capability to deconstruct its mythological roots.

Three Burials begins in an unspecified Texas town, where a border patrolman named Mike Norton (Barry Pepper) accidentally shoots an illegal immigrant, Melquiades Estrada (Julio Cedillo). To avoid a legal quagmire, the lazy and racist Sheriff Belmont (Dwight Yoakam) forgoes an investigation and buries the body unceremoniously, leaving Melquiades's friend Pete Perkins (Tommy Lee Jones) incensed. Ascertaining the killer's identity by his own means, Pete then takes Mike hostage, digs up Melquiades's corpse, and totes them both on horseback into Mexico. Pete plans to return the body to Melquiades's wife and bury it in his hometown. The film juxtaposes small town America's listless and incompetent masculinities with Pete's flashbacks of corralling steer and bonding with Melquiades; at the same time, its cinematography contrasts the harsh, steely tones of the town's interiors with the pastoral glow of the country-

side. The combined effect aligns us with Pete's subjectivity, and, like him, we become sick with the portrait of present day America and long for Classical Western justice to set things aright. Midway through the film, when Pete saddles the horses and rides towards Mexico, the film enacts the cowboy's frontier journey: fleeing society's ethical malaise and dissolving the troublesome nature/culture opposition.

Our scene occurs in an underdeveloped little Mexican village where Mike must recover from a snakebite. Pete, meanwhile, unwinds in the *Cantina Liebre* awaiting a long-distance connection to his sometime girlfriend Rachel (Melissa Leo). He has a bit of a 'shine on', partly because he's been sipping tequila and partly because, at this stage in his journey, exhausted, fixated on his role as captor, and closely acquainted with advanced bodily rot, he's beginning to lose his mind. Surprisingly, his composure has never looked more serene. Maybe it's the motley amalgamation of the *mise-en-scène* that meets with his wavelength. The advanced setting sun issues streaks of purple and orange; a Mexican girl keys Chopin on a creaky, out-of-tune piano; a dubbed fifties-era sci-fi film plays on a black and white TV; and strung through the cantina, pulling all the discordance together, is a charming string of Christmas lights. Further echoing Pete's wavelength is the bizarre sound of a radio dial, channels fading in and out, as though his mind were an antenna tuning in to remote frequencies in tandem. Several characters have accused our protagonist of being crazy by now, and we have begun to worry if his apparent love of this 'scene' is testimony to that fact.

Next comes the phone call and Pete asks Rachel to leave her husband and come marry him in Mexico. She had previously told Pete she loved him, quite disingenuously, though Pete seems to have taken her at her word. Moments before, so at home in the cantina, he must have thought 'If Rachel could only see this "scene" the way I do, she would *get* me, too'. Alas, she is bewildered: "Pete you don't understand, I have to go." He hangs up the phone and lurches out of the cantina, around the corner and into a little shed. He slowly unwraps the coverings from his only friend, the long rotten Melquiades. The stomach-churning fetor, to which others frequently bear witness, in no way registers on Pete's face, however. He can only utter, "You look like hell, son," as he proceeds to comb him with a horse brush, pulling the hair clean off his head with a dull scraping sound. Defeated, he slumps back against the shed wall, resigned to utter alienation.

This scene is what I take to be the film's centrepiece, expressing the culmination of two contradictory impulses underlying the entire film: the romantic promise of the Western fable and the material denial of its possibility. The

two come together here in an off-kilter, quasi-surreal composition, unhinging our confidence in the protagonist's narrational authority. In the style of Pasolini, director Jones conveys a 'free indirect discourse', oscillating between the objective sounds in the cantina and the warped noise passing through Pete's mindscape. This not only sets Pete apart, it forces us to appreciate the setting's discordant elements as harmonised through Pete's peculiar point of view. Equally important are the sundry odd details, such as Pete's bow-legged walk and the limping bartender with the large hoop

tion are suppressed from our perspective, Pete restores this tendency by romanticizing the *mise-en-scène's* jumble of imperfections into the 'perfect scene'. While we can persist in being cynical about such romantic fables we can still identify with Pete, at least from a certain remove, as being one of more than a few Americans past middle age whose masculinity has been largely shaped through icons of Western performance.

So, too, is there the sense that we are 'seeing' two sensibilities at once, strictly on the level of cinematogra-

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earing, because they draw attention to themselves, away from any propensity toward abstraction.

The primacy of concrete details and graphic imagery is a key feature of the late Western as a whole, which deviates from the Classical tradition. The Classical Western has a unique capacity to idealize a formative period in US history, aggrandizing the cowboy's heroic feats, while fleshing out the *mise-en-scène* with enough historical minutia, sand, and grit as to make it all believable. Such is the crafty way the genre has succeeded in conflating myth with fact, instilling (particularly within American audiences) a mythological sense of history. This success, Douglas Pye argues, is achieved principally through a stylistic formula that balances romantic abstraction and concrete detail. Following Northrop Frye's structuralist theory of myth, Pye interprets the Classical Western as a blend of the Romance narrative and low-mimetic manner (204, 209-15).

By contrast, the late Western genre eschews romanticism while further intensifying a low-mimetic style. Instead of superior masculine prototypes and quick-draw gunslingers, we watch ordinary men caught in dysfunctional relationships, struggling with guns that misfire (*Unforgiven*), villains that get away (*No Country for Old Men*), and heroes that shoot people in the back (*Assassination of Jesse James*). This effectively cracks the form's glossy sheen of myth. Yet, in such a strongly coded genre as the Western, the romantic connotation may linger in the ether of the film's diegesis, continually tugging at us as a noticeable absence. *Three Burials*, and the cantina scene especially, exploit this fractured visibility. Even as the signs of romantic abstrac-

tion are suppressed from our perspective, Pete restores this tendency by romanticizing the *mise-en-scène's* jumble of imperfections into the 'perfect scene'. While we can persist in being cynical about such romantic fables we can still identify with Pete, at least from a certain remove, as being one of more than a few Americans past middle age whose masculinity has been largely shaped through icons of Western performance. So, too, is there the sense that we are 'seeing' two sensibilities at once, strictly on the level of cinematogra-

phy. This ostensibly provides the viewer a 'thwarted fable' of the kind Jacques Rancière explicates in *Film Fables*. For Rancière, the camera's impassive recording of materiality is predisposed to thwart the fable—the storytelling function aimed towards a consciously determined end—by persistently drawing attention to the *thingliness* within the image. He writes: "A constant principle of [*mise-en-scène*] is to supplement—and thwart—narrative continuity and the rationality of the goals by not aligning two visibilities" (16). Rancière proceeds to demonstrate that this can take place in an infinite number of ways, among all the genres of experimental, documentary, and narrative cinema; but in each instance the film fable is a thwarted fable, aesthetically enriched through its disjunctive synthesis of noumenal materiality and fictional pretence, of truth and lies.

Rancière's choice of the word *fable* is especially appropriate here because it connotes a story secured in a simplified moral universe, an otherwise tall tale requiring the extension of belief. We might consider the Classical Western text as just such a fable, that which in our present era has become a bygone model that once asserted our trust in the stability of ethical values and America's foundational spirit. For the purpose of this analysis, we might also consider the similar term *myth* in keeping with Richard Slotkin's 'Frontier Myth' formulation, as the root symbolic narrative ubiquitous in American film and literature (Western genre and otherwise). More specifically, Slotkin's Frontier Myth represents "the redemption of American spirit or fortune as something to be achieved by playing

through a scenario of separation, temporary regression to a more primitive or 'natural' state, and *regeneration through violence*" (12). The fable then, is the outworn fiction, cut off from its source in consensual belief, whereas the myth is the condensation of those operant ideologies, still insidiously buried within the text's substructure.

Qualifying these terms this way, the Post-Mortem Western emerges as a distinct form of thwarted fable, one that resurrects the spectre of the Classical Western text only to quash it through its diegetic immersion in postmodernity. The old fable is called to the fore connotatively, through horse and cowboy iconography,

of thought avail to a sea of instinctual primitivism. On the deep mythic level, this communion with the raw and barbaric, either from without or within, delivers salvation. The Frontier Myth lurks beneath the surface, structuring narrative logic that at once summons our allegiance and insults our intelligence. The perpetual cycles of the genre's death and rebirth and the multitude of quasi-Western incarnations clearly have something to do with this myth's power, both awesome and crude. Our scene expresses this alternating fascination as a disjunctive juxtaposition, not only in the duality of visibilities but also in the spatial contrast between the cantina and the shed. The former,

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but the *mise-en-scène* insists upon its own present-dayness. Images of modernization and post-industrial banality cause a perceptual incongruence—helicopters patrolling the canyon while Pete rides horseback into Mexico ruin the portrait's idyllic harmony. As opposed to the cohesion maintained in Pye's model of the Classical Western, a double vision of two competing iconographies ensues, continually pushing the fable back into an irrecoverable past. In the same way, the cantina scene's split-subjectivity puts us at a remove from Pete as the fable's sole exponent. This has a double and concurrent effect: the fable betrays not only how conspicuously out of joint it is with public perception, but also how stubbornly entrenched it is within American identity. The Western's root language has bonded to an aspect of American Exceptionalism that apprehends the West as a long-established regenerative fount. The frontier, for example, simultaneously spells escape from a spoiled society and purification of the soul through a ritual of violence. Just as it serves as a prescription for masculine subject formation, the 'way of the West' is also the ancestral path towards restoring America's democratic values and institutions.

Of course, the absence of an actual frontier begets a cultural desire to recreate one mythically, in America's outlying parched landscapes, in rural Mexico, in post-Apocalyptic scenarios, in outer space, or even in the liminal reaches of the mind, where the floodgates

colourfully glamourized through Pete's point of view, sets up the promise of life-long happiness with Rachel. Whereas the latter, squalid and metallic, speaks the truth of Pete's deranged condition—he has no one to confide in but a corpse. Melquiades's unsightly remains represent the Western fable's present condition, what is long dead and what Pete, against all odds, endeavours tirelessly to resurrect. Just how many times will the Western be pronounced 'dead' and then resurrected once again, anyway? Surely the zombie-Western hybrid is not far off...

Continuing with the film's self-conscious fabular structure, it is curious that we never see Pete and Melquiades interact but through Pete's many flashbacks. From the outset, the film is in the habit of looking back to a time when all that was golden, vital, and praiseworthy revolved around the figure of Melquiades. One such day, Pete vowed that if Melquiades should die, he would bury him in Mexico and not in Texas, "beneath all the fucking billboards." To fulfil his pledge, Pete becomes the righteous outlaw: enacting vigilante justice on the killer, kidnapping, grave robbing, and stealing into Mexico with the police and border patrol in close pursuit. The Western fable dictates such courage, to risk one's life and social acceptance in order to 'do what a man's gotta do'; to honour the homosocial bond here consummates the masculine ideal. There is a catch, however, as we learn that Melquiades never actually had a wife, nor is there any village called Jimenez—either Melquiades lied or Pete remembered incorrectly. But Pete refuses to believe

this. He obstinately roams the outback in search of the mythical Jimenez until he comes across some old ruins that he convinces himself is the place, so he can bury the body and keep the fabular logic intact.

Pete's nostalgia for a better time mirrors the Western's nostalgia for a post-bellum America, before late 19th century modernity significantly restructured men's lives in the public and private sphere. From this early point in its history, the Western provided a mythic escape for men through homosocial narratives of male bonding which, as literary critic Jane Tompkins argues, freed them from the clutches of women and religion (47-67). Both Tompkins and sociologist Michael S. Kimmel consider the Classical Western as an anti-feminist reaction to the 19th century's 'feminization of culture', a reaction born of masculinist impulses to police boundaries between the sexes by gendering value-laden domains (Kimmel 21). According to the Western, the woman's world is the home, the school, and the church, while the man's is the frontier, the saloon, and the savage war. Because the cowboy is severed from the world of education, words, and emotions, he has stamped out his inner life, as Tompkins alleges, resulting in a hard-bitten taciturnity. This pitiable disconnection is perhaps best expressed in the way Pete's unending devotion to the homosocial bond forgoes heterosexual partnership in favour of nestling a male corpse bride. For all the romantic splendour conferred upon the figure of Melquiades, the mortal *thingliness* of his corpse never ceases to remind us of the brutal truth; Pete enjoins us to make love to the fable despite its peeling flesh. Above all, the scene is an elegiac lament for the cowboy's lonesomeness—in the way the *mise-en-scène* turns from twinkling luminescence to glum alienation, in the way Rachel turns him down flat and he seems rather unsurprised, in the way nobody alive understands him. The cost for his principles is absolute, depriving him of everything but his resolve.

But is it worth it? The aforementioned tensions culminate here to force the question, one that the film does well to sustain without an easy answer—because Melquiades's shooting was an accident and not born of malevolent intent; because one's place of burial is, at bottom, an issue for the worms; because there is no real Jimenez and no grieving wife; because Pete's actions border on the megalomaniacal; because living in a society means living in an imperfect world. For all of these reasons, which are made abundantly clear to the viewer, the fable is stripped of its utopian connotations and lodged as an insular principle in Pete's mind. The only justification remaining is that 'the Norton boy's gotta be taught a lesson'.

In this respect, the film puts forward an argument embracing the Frontier Myth as necessary for an ethical and

exemplary masculinity. Pete Perkins, leather-faced cowboy that he is, seems to have already been through the ritual of separation, regression, and violent regeneration that the Frontier Myth prescribes. He therefore serves as the older, wiser mentor needed for Mike's moral tutelage. Mike, smarmy and aggressively domineering, exhibits a compulsive masculinity. Kimmel perceives the common characteristics of "violence, aggression, extreme competitiveness, [and] a gnawing insecurity" as the defining features of a compulsive masculinity, "a masculinity that must always prove itself and that is always in doubt" (93). Mike Norton constantly tries to prove his manliness by beating illegal immigrants and by 'plowing' his 'baby-doll' wife (January Jones) in short, loveless spurts. As Pete succeeds in breaking Mike's arrogance and humbling his spirit, the film recuperates the cowboy as a noble knight-errant. By the end, even Mike begins to come around to Pete's point of view. The final shot of Pete riding away with Mike, the pupil, calling out after him, replays the fabular ending as seen in *Shane* (George Stevens, 1953), *Pale Rider* (Clint Eastwood, 1985), and *Dances With Wolves*. Even though *Three Burials* casts the fable in a doubtful, regressive light, it redeems an ethical education from the underlying Frontier Myth. And yet, enacting the Frontier Myth's scenario in and of itself requires a compulsive masculinity, which is a premise that the film critiques in a more oblique way.

Though virtue distinguishes him from Mike, Pete's masculinity is also compulsive. Although, the film's taut balance between identification and alienation makes that fact difficult to discern. As mentioned, the many instances of singling him out as 'duped'—by characters who call him crazy, by his refusal to believe otherwise about Melquiades's story, by his glazed expression now and again—reinforce our prejudices of the fable's unpopular standing and alienate us from the protagonist. Despite these alienating conventions, however, the film's form ensures that we identify with Pete. It obviously helps that, as a rule, outcast heroes draw our sympathy, a convention that is all the more vital to what makes the Western tick; but also the range of narration is closely restricted to Pete's point of view, depicting him as the only mindful and caring soul at odds with an apathetic community. This, compounded with how our sensibility is aligned with his through the emotional colouring of the *mise-en-scène* and non-diegetic music, constantly counters the alienating effect. Consequently, we know why people call him crazy, but we probably don't believe them on a gut level; while we watch him losing his mind, his firmness of purpose still wins our trust.

Indeed, we may hardly notice how we are gradually induced into Pete's emotive brand of ethics and righteous indignation, how we begin to abide his kidnapping, his disinterment of a dead body, his willingness to shoot Mike,

and his intractable need to fulfil his quest. Even so, at some point we begin to see that he has gone too far and we have been enthralled and won over by a compulsive masculinity. The degree to which we fail to recognize being carried along in this way reveals the degree to which the Frontier Myth still has its hooks in us, the degree to which we still find something worthy and redeemable in its influence on masculine subject formation. Perhaps the sharpest hook is our belief that violence in the hands of a competent and seasoned masculinity is not only tolerable, but necessary.

This brings us back to our scene, which we can examine one last time on the level of performance. We watch Pete Perkins drinking in the cantina, obdurate and weathered like an old stone shaped by nature's attrition. Life can set upon him little that is new. The depth of his eyes, registering a well of tenderness behind a wary countenance, never ceases to reel us in and cast us out again as we guard against his next defiance. There is something about his masculinity that is tragically familiar, the way one's armour and compassion can be worked over by circumstance. What will ail this parched Fisher King, we wonder, this forlorn cowboy with his bottomless wound? For now it seems to be something in the uncanny atmosphere of the place, the lurid living skies, the soft electric lights, and the young girl plunking a sentimental piece of Chopin. The scene's many cracks and imperfections faintly mirror Pete's brokenness. Indeed, it is rather strange and wonderful how this warms Pete, as he smiles bemusedly to himself; amidst the decomposing debris of the Western, he seems at peace for the first time since Melquiades's death.

Such is the way masculinities can be understood and absorbed through direct performative transmission: through bodies, eyes, and mouths. The poetic mix of pain and beauty is the scene's wellspring reverberating outward through the many levels of ambivalence. In the 1970s, theatre critic Eric Bentley commented on the powerful influence John Wayne's bodily performance had on subject formation and the political during the Cold War era. In the case of Wayne, whose pugnacious *machismo* Bentley saw as the essence of Anti-Communism, the body *became* the body politic (308). A similar thing can be said of Tommy Lee Jones, whose unique combination of iron and rust, stone and feeling, stands for the strong emotions—and less certain thoughts—that we have nowadays about cowboy masculinities. Lest we take its small-scale of late as an indication of the Western's outmodedness, to be sure, the cowboy body politic is alive and well. Just as the world and a divided America watched its last cowboy president wield a compulsively masculine foreign policy through a two-term presidency, we are continually astonished to see culture making vintage from this gnarled and bitter fruit. Surely

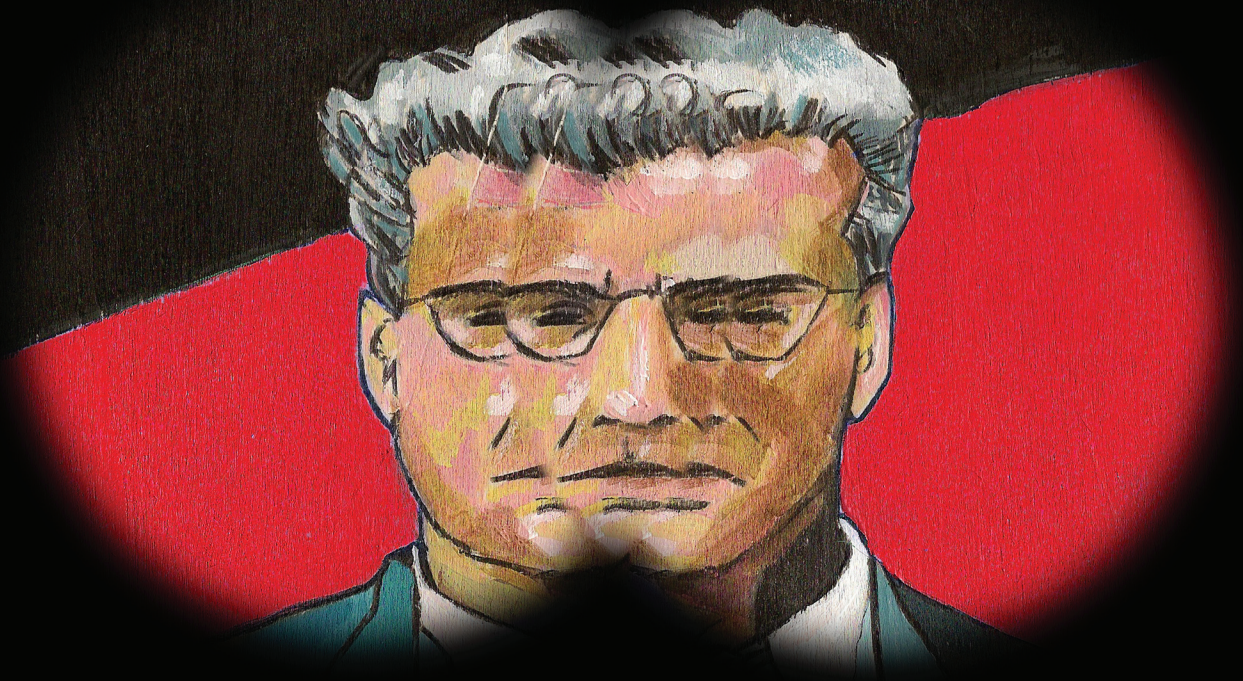
Three Burials, with its left-leaning sensibilities, makes no apologies for George W. Bush, but it certainly sits amongst a cycle of films that can partly explain the muddled thinking and feeling that elected him to office.

Despite my attempts to clarify how *Three Burials* plays with and against convention, warping and weaving generic processes, the film would rather tangle it all up and leave us with a confused knot in our stomach. It genuinely tries to recuperate America's knight-errant while simultaneously alluding to the masculinist, compulsive trappings afoot in the genre's formative heritage. But above all else it reflects the love-hate relationship America and the rest of the world have with the cowboy. Pete represents an undying affection for what everyone else sees as gone to rot. It's not rot, the contemporary Western insists, but refined ferment. The juices of the Frontier Myth having long since reacted with the counter-culture climate, have boiled away the mustiness and distilled a potent new tonic. *Three Burials* proves most viscerally how we remain galvanized by Post-Mortem genres, ever watchful for the moment when the corpse starts to turn.

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Hitch-cockeyed

Ocular Dys/function in Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window*

Larry Dudenhoeffer

*There was a line/there was a formula;
Sharp as a knife/facts cut a hole in us*
-Talking Heads, "Crosseyed and Painless"

Other critics discuss the theme of voyeurism in Alfred Hitchcock's 1954 *Rear Window* (Modleski 73; Mulvey 31; Samuels 112-14), but few of them mention the specular figuration of the film's *mise-en-scène*.¹

1. In "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Mulvey famously argues that *Rear Window* compels viewer identification with the "voyeuristic situation" of the film's main character. The film thus turns Lisa Fremont, its female sex interest, into an exhibitionist subject to male fetishization, scopoc control, and sadistic interpellation as "wrong" (31). Modleski re-elaborates this thesis, suggesting that such interpretations require women's assent, meaning that Lisa comes to represent the female spectator "in masculine drag," complicit in reaffirming androcentric worldviews (84). Samuels finds these visual structures more narcissistic than voyeuristic. He redirects male identification towards the murderer's wife in the film so as to make room for the expression and disavowal of same-sex desire (116-7). However, according to Howe, the murderer displaces Hitch-

In the film, voyeur L.B. Jeffries (James Stewart) comes to suspect salesman Lars Thorwald (Raymond Burr) of murdering his sickly wife Anna (Irene Winston). From a wheelchair, Jeffries watches for evidence of the murder from the two windows looking into the Thorwalds' Greenwich Village apartment. "Jeff," resting up after fracturing his leg, whiles away the time spying on his neighbors, and ultimately convinces his fashion-conscious fiancée Lisa Fremont (Grace Kelly) to investigate the Thorwalds' apartment after suspecting Lars of covering up Anna's

cock's audience awareness: "Having our look returned makes us aware of our own voyeurism" (34). Hitchcock's mobile camerawork, unlike Jeffries's unidirectional own, teaches the viewer an appreciation of "being-for-others" and the concomitant dangers of social isolation (33-4). These theories, while quite analytically rich, do not address the splitting of the scopoc regime in the film: the non-coincidence of the viewer's and the characters' conscious detective work with their unrepresentable desire for the real, *for the impossible to occur to them*.

murder there.² Lars catches Lisa in the act, even though she escapes after a few officers show up to question the two of them. Thorwald nevertheless follows Lisa's signals and triangulates the eye-line into Jeff's apartment.³ He shows up there to confront Jeff, who fires off camera flashbulbs to disorient the murderer until the officers once again come to the rescue. Although this climactic moment in the film deserves the critical attention it gets,⁴ a few earlier scenes more neatly capture the scopic regime of the film's viewers and characters, one that suggests that 'having a bad wheel', at least in a Lacanian sense, refers to the relative incapacitation

and ego-shattering enjoyment that at once drive and resist such profilmic representation.

The scene in *Rear Window* that most formally allegorizes this type of splitting features Jeff and visiting therapist Stella (Thelma Ritter) fantasizing signs of Anna's murder *from a first-person perspective* and then figuring them into the otherwise commonplace activity of Thorwald's apartment. Two important similarly voyeuristic moments in the film set up this scene: one in which Jeff spies on the Thorwalds' acrimonious relationship and another in which Jeff watches Lars suspiciously dispose of some sharp instruments. These

Jeff looks straight with one eye at the window corresponding to Being, and inward with the other eye, for the moment collapsing Meaning from the seen/scene and thus courting destruction.

of their eyes (or *I's*) rather than their legs. The two windows of Thorwald's apartment mirror the viewer's and Jeff's eyes—Jeff even uses binoculars and a telephoto lens over the course of the narrative to examine the murder scene more closely. Later in the film, Hitchcock's camera comes to focus straightaway on one window or the other, so that these 'eyes' function independently of each other in a way that resembles the ocular dysfunction of strabismus. This condition reflects the splitting of the film's scopic register: one eye trains *straightforwardly* on the film's narrative moves, character identities, and other readable elements, and the other *inwardly* on the unconscionable desires, fantasies,

moments enable us to rework the relation of the Lacanian subject of the unconscious to the symbolic order so as to 'set up' a discussion of Jeff, Lisa, Stella, and the viewer's fantasmatic crossing over into the scene of the crime.

Technically, strabismus refers to the "crossing of the eyes," a misalignment affecting their directional axes: in its alternating variety, the subject can fixate only with one eye and then the other, with the "straight" eye functioning and the other not (Anderson 1636). *Rear Window's* monocular fixation on one or another window in its *mise-en-scène* resembles this condition, and moreover Jacques Lacan's notion of the *Spaltung* or "split subject." In "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious," Lacan revises *cogito ergo sum* to account for the unconscious' relation to the structures of language: "What we must say is: I am not, where I am the plaything of my thought; I think about what I am where I do not think I am thinking" (157). Subjectivity, for Lacan, does not translate into intellection or consciousness. The subject rather transitions from the real to the symbolic register: from a state of immediacy, indeterminacy, and "completeness" that remains outside of speech, individuation, and consciousness—all of which requiring *difference*—to the accession to this difference in the form of sociolinguistic representation (*Ecrits* 42, 64). Lacan thus argues that "when the subject appears somewhere as meaning, he is manifested elsewhere as 'fading', as disappearance" (*Four Concepts* 218). The transition from

2. Jeffries calls the other characters "Lisa" and "Thorwald" in the film; conversely, Lisa shortens Jeffries to "Jeff." We will thus follow the film's nomenclature for these characters.

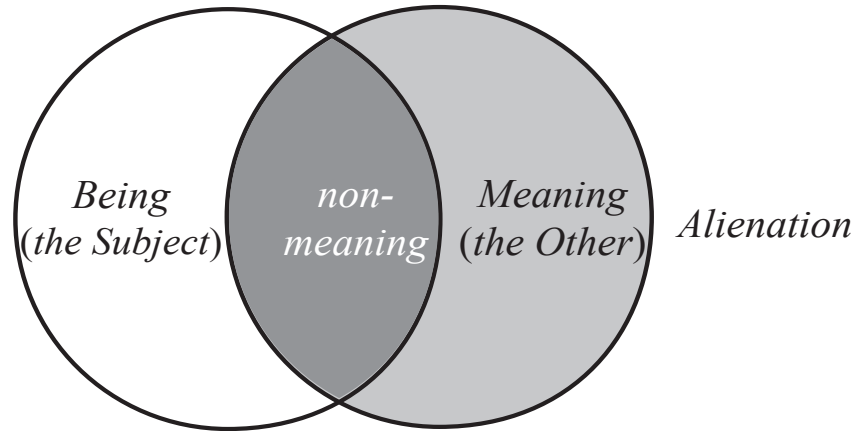
3. Manlove, in an essay that comes full circle once again to Mulvey, argues that Lisa, the object of visual desire in the film, veils the real, Lacan's term for egoic dissolution. This desire *leaves a stain* that threatens Jeff and Lisa with destruction in allowing the murderer to trace it to its specular sources (96-9).

4. For example, Harris argues that Jeffries, in imposing "fantasy on reality" throughout the film, seriously endangers others as "he becomes increasingly enveloped by his sickness" (60). In *Seminar XI*, though, Lacan argues that the real supports fantasy, which in turn "protects the real" (41), while fantasy, not objectal reality, supports desire (185-6). The left windows of Thorwald's apartment do not visualize Jeff's sick fantasies or a ratiocinative set of data *so much as allegorize the impossible support of desire*, thus fracturing and recasting the viewer's own scopic drives in watching *Rear Window*. In short, these windows trace the impossible of the real, *the eye-line of our own unrepresentable enjoyment ricocheting from the suspicious activities seen in the left side windows of the apartment*.

the real—“vanishing being” (*Écrits* 64)—to meaning in the symbolic order inscribes the division of the subject. Lacan describes as *aphanisis* this movement in which the signifier alienates the subject from the non-conscious state of *simply being*. The real, the name for this absolute state, resists symbolic capture, determines the limits of conceptualization, and reemerges in those encounters traumatic to subjective consciousness. Lacan diagrams the set of exchanges under which these terms function; this diagram (figure 1) coincidentally resembles a set of ‘eyes’ that refuse to cooperate with each other (*Écrits* 67; *Four Concepts* 188).

other (*Four Concepts* 22-23). The real and the symbolic, in a sense, ‘look’ in on each other in Lacan’s diagram, in a way that figures the esotropic form of strabismus, in which one eye wanders towards the other/Other.

The windows of Lars Thorwald’s apartment in *Rear Window* correspond to the circles in Lacan’s diagram. The two left windows, corresponding to the circle that circumscribes *Being*, frame Thorwald’s kitchen and living room. Anika Lemaire describes *Being* as “lived experience” (51-52), an approximation of these



The Spaltung Diagram in Seminar XI

Figure 1

Lacan couches the subject’s relation to the Other—the field of language—in false terms of choice, since existentially the subject must ‘make sense’ in order to develop recognizably into *a human being with an unconscious*, or someone whose representations do not neatly square with its desires, fantasies, and somatic impulses :

[We] are dealing with [...] the being of the subject, that which is there beneath the meaning. If we choose being, the subject disappears, it eludes us, it falls into non-meaning. If we choose meaning, the meaning survives only deprived of that part of non-meaning that is, strictly speaking, that which constitutes in the realization of the subject the unconscious. (*Four Concepts* 211)

The real thus survives in the subject’s unconscious, straddling the division of *Being* and *Meaning*. The unconscious, developing out of this division, thus resembles the differential structure of representation, while at the same time opening onto the real as its “ultimately unknown” centre, as the “gap” that enables the discrimination of forms (e.g., the spaces in *in-between-ness*), makes immediate self-relation impossible, and thus splits the thinking subject into its own

‘living’ or ‘lived-in’ rooms. Lacan moreover, situates traces of the real in the semantics of the unconscious and the irregularities of language (*Écrits* 12, 55, 80). These diagrammatic terms inform the first set-up of Jeff, Lisa, and Stella’s reconstruction of the murder scene. The camera, ostensibly from Jeff’s apartment window, follows Thorwald carrying Anna’s dinner into the bedroom; the film cuts to Jeff watching them and then to the couple as Anna derisively tosses away the flower Lars offers her. The film then cuts to another shot of Jeff, now intent on their interaction, and once more to a shot of the two windows and the drainpipe separating them. In the living room, Thorwald uses a telephone to speak to someone, maybe a mistress; this room thus represents the voice of the Other in the unconscious, the aggression we must repress in the *infans* stages of development (24), since Thorwald might be colluding with this someone to murder his wife.

The right window, corresponding to the circle that circumscribes *Meaning*, frames the Thorwalds’ bedroom, in which Anna convalesces. She moves towards the left, though, to eavesdrop on Lars’s telephone conversations—to follow the voice of the Other—and then mocks Lars in

the bedroom, sublimating into symbolic expression the deadly tensions in this scene. Lacan abstracts the sexual drive from the other drives, situating it in the circle that designates *Meaning*, the demands of culture that “dissolve” the sexual drive into symbolic structures like marriage (*Four Concepts* 189). The bedroom, the usual site of sexual relations, also functions as the locus of the Other: Anna Thorwald, seen from the right window corresponding to *Meaning*, assimilates the implications of Lars’s telephone conversation into the schemas of understanding, narrative impetus, and symbolic conclusion (39). The camera following them focuses on the two windows in a way that suggests a functional, cooperative set of eyes; that types the marital turbulence Jeff, Hitchcock, and the viewer see as normative, even dismissible; and that suggests the opening and closing of the unconscious in the interaction of the drives circulating like telephone currents in the left circle and their symbolic codification—akin to marriage—in the right circle, Lacan seeing “support” for the sexual drive in this split (198-99).

The annex connecting the rooms and the events that transpire in that space remain offscreen, behind the drainpipe, *in a non-interpretable gap out of which nevertheless comes new expectations and new significations*. The annex thus corresponds to the interstice of *non-meaning* in the diagram, where Lacan argues ‘truth’ awaits its realization in the Other (33, 129). For example, Lars, when disappearing into this area, disappears for a moment from the diegesis, only to reemerge with new significance in the window that designates *Meaning*. Anna’s reaction there in that room signifies Lars’s infidelity and offers Jeff the chance to thereafter construct a narrative motive for Anna’s murder. Anna, rising from the mattress, touches *non-meaning* like a dreamer, then comes to terms, again in the area of *Meaning*, with the ‘truth’ about Lars’s conversations.

Moreover, the drainpipe intersecting the bedroom and living room windows effectively signifies the splitting of the marriage. It also signifies, though, the division of the subject into the “lived experience” of *Being* and the social “I” of *Meaning*, which Lacan terms the *Spaltung* in order to represent it as \$ algebraically (*Ecrits* 301). The drainpipe resembles the slash in this symbol, dis-unifying the scene, the narrative action within it, and the fantasmatic/ratio-cinative investments of the subjects watching it, whether L.B. Jeffries, Lisa Fremont, or *Rear Window*’s audience. The drainpipe and windows also figure as a face,⁵ with the drainpipe representing the nose and the windows the eyes.

5. *Rear Window* focuses these shots on the living room and bedroom windows, while for the most part, excluding visual access to the kitchen window. Similarly, Lacan situates the real outside of our experiences in the imaginary and symbolic orders (*Four Concepts* 280).

The camera’s alternation from one window to the other thus afflicts an esotropic sort of strabismus on Jeff and the viewer, who, like Anna, turn an eye inward on the real, a traumatic move that compels the saccadic retreat to the symbolic and threatens the collapse, absencing, or ‘murder’ of their subjectivity.

In this first exchange, the ‘fovea’ of the camera thus starts to misalign, at first concentrating more on the window corresponding to *Meaning*.⁶ Lars waves Anna away when she laughs at him, a sublimation of a murderous impulse, and one that foreshadows Anna’s narrative effacement. When Jeff falls asleep, we thus see the windows darkening—much like the darkening of Jeff’s eyes—which signifies Anna’s murder and suggests a radical alteration of the film’s *mise-en-scène* in the camera’s strabismus-like torsions. In another important set-up to the investigation of the crime scene, the film shows Jeff in a medium shot sitting at the window, watching Thorwald’s actions, first through binoculars and then through a telephoto camera. He sees the left windows open, with Thorwald closing an attaché case full of Anna’s valuables, moving into the kitchen to wrap a saw and butcher knife in newspaper, and returning to the living room to relax. The film cuts to Thorwald stretching, ready to take a nap, and then to the anxious cast of Jeff’s face, eyes darting in close-up once more to the left.

These images represent more than the *tuche*, the encounter with the real, which remains inassimilable to consciousness (*Four Concepts* 53, 55). The matheme \$, we must remember, marks the symbolic castration/sexuation of the subject, who “cannot be wholly represented in the Other” (25). The cut identifies the real with this ontic remainder; at the same time, it compels the subject to fantasize a text that tries to compensate for the Other’s failure to capture this remainder (26). *Rear Window* darkens Anna’s representational status while at the same time reframes it as a mystery for Jeff, Lisa, Stella, and the audience to solve. The *tuche* coincides with the entextuation of Anna’s fate, since these characters, in order to fill in this gap in their understanding (Lisa: “What’s a logical explanation for a woman

6. Jeffries’s/Hitchcock’s camera of course extends, refocuses, and mediates the subject’s range of vision, even as *it cannot see what it really wants to see*: the desire that at once structures the ‘readouts’ of this vision and threatens ‘to screw’ with the subject’s scopic universe—to turn on the non-presence of the subject’s desire within this universe. See Copjec on the “trap” of the Lacanian gaze in “The Orthopsychic Subject: Film Theory and the Reception of Lacan”:

The subject is thus conceived as split from its desire, and desire itself is conceived as something—precisely—unrealized [...] The subject, in short, cannot be located or locate itself at the point of the gaze, since this point marks, on the contrary, its very annihilation. At the moment the gaze is discerned, the image, the entire visual field, takes on a terrifying alterity. (294, 300)

In other words, *looking out for murder* implicates the eye desire-wise in *looking forward to its own self-destruction, to being part of rather than symbolically mastering what it sees*.

taking a trip with no luggage?”), must tap into that necessarily missing element in the Other, *the ego-convulsing sense of murderous enjoyment*⁷ (Jeff: “That [...] where she was going she wouldn’t need any luggage”). If castration sets the conditions for suspense, with one word or image anticipating another that might complete its meaning, it also motions towards *the suspension of the Other* in the subject’s encounter with that radical otherness that is the real.⁸ These images thus suggest the overwhelming of the symbolic, the cleansing of evidence—i.e., a repertoire of signifiers—and the concealment of implements of castration, a metaphor integral to Lacan’s theorization of a split subject. The father *imago* frustrates the infant’s incestuous desire for unification with the mother; the infant develops an unconscious

As for the second objection, the images in the windows corresponding to *Being* momentarily disrupt the film’s diegetic continuity and intelligibility, so that theorists like Lee Edelman and Robert Samuels can argue that Thorwald triggers Jeff’s erotic connection to other men or unconscious desire to “cut” Lisa Fremont (Edelman, 91-92; Samuels 114-15).⁹ For example, when Lisa calls Jeff “diseased” about five more minutes into the film, she does not do so merely to revile his fantasies or voyeuristic tendencies—she rather cautions against Jeff’s and Thorwald’s strabismus-like focus on the windows corresponding to *Being*, or that which remains anterior and threatening to the speaking subject. She thus makes troublesome a fixation that revisits the specular-aggressive dialectic of the mirror’s

Rear Window darkens Anna’s representational status while at the same time reframes it as a mystery for Jeff, Lisa, Stella, and the audience to solve.

when it internalizes this *imago* as the line separating the real from *Meaning* in the subjective condition (*Ecrits* 276; Lemaire 82-83). If the film remaps this structure of castration, why, we might ask, do two windows overlap with the circle designating *Being* in Lacan’s diagram, whereas only one window overlaps with *Meaning*? And why do the images in them signify murder rather than overwhelm signification outright? An answer to the first objection must mention the two registers that anticipate *Meaning* in the symbolic: the real, which speculatively antecedes ‘castration’ and corresponds to the kitchen window, where implements of castration ‘vanish’, and the imaginary, which exteriorizes the ‘I’ in the subject’s misrecognition of itself in its mirror image (*Ecrits* 3, 17, 23) and corresponds to the living room window through which Lars later catches Jeff looking at him, much as the subject and its mirror-image ‘look’ at each other.

captation of this subject (*Ecrits* 20, 199).¹⁰ In short, the saws Jeff and the viewer see threaten their disarticulation. Jeff, fixating on the left-side of Thorwald’s apartment after using a telephoto camera to scrutinize it, deranges

9. Edelman associates the real with the anal compulsion that “stands behind” the symbolic order, arguing that *Rear Window* tries to squeeze Lisa and Anna out of its narrative as markers of castration so as to fantasmatically return Jeffries to the sexual freedom of “anal formlessness” (92). However, Samuels rethinks this same-sex desire in the film, contending that Jeffries aspires to a sexual “compromise formation,” secretly wanting “a man and a woman” (115). Jeff must therefore re-imagine Lisa in non-castratory terms. These theorists refocus the viewer on the nonsense rather than the meaningfulness of sexual desire. If it seems nonsense, though, to claim that a medium cannot represent its own characters’ self-annihilating desire, we must remember that desire wants the impossible, and *the impossible occurs to us only as an effect of speech, even as we find that with it we can never say what ‘it is’ that we want.*

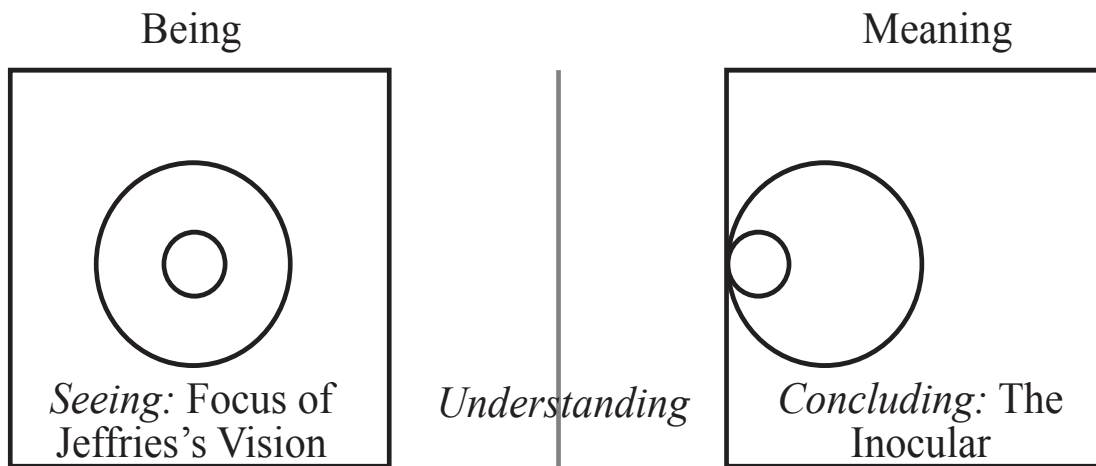
10. Lacan argues that the mirror *imago* of the infant “manifests the affective dynamism” through which it develops its characteristic “inner conflictual tension,” meaning that the *imago* at once offers it a gestalt representation of its discrete form and intensifies the distress resulting from the “intra-organic and relational discordance” of its first six months (20-1). The mirror splits the infant along the real and symbolic registers, a splitting and an overlapping thus describable as a sort of “ambivalent aggressiveness” (21). Elsewhere, Lacan conjectures that a patient of his who enjoys sticking his feet out of the window—somewhat like Jeffries, with one foot stuck straight out in a cast—must therefore take an interest in the *imaginary* “direction of his birth” (199).

7. As Stella tellingly says to Lisa in another scene, “Nobody ever invented a polite word for a killin’ yet.”

8. To misquote Georges Bataille a little, “if [Thorwald] is in the end only our own madness, if we come to tears, if we shudder in sorrow—or if we are seized by fits of laughter—can we fail to perceive [...] the preoccupation with, the haunting fear of death” (23)?

the image of ordinary tools and utensils into something 'wrong'. He switches to binoculars to watch Thorwald enter the bedroom. At the moment of this transition into *Meaning*, Jeff starts to translate the images we earlier saw into symbols, into narrative elements, a telegraphing of the movement of "things" into signification across the divide of *non-meaning* or the unconscious (*Four Concepts* 22-23). He even manages to convince Lisa of the murder, although not without some resistance, since their relationship, much

"Let's start from the beginning, Jeff. Tell me everything you saw and what you think it means." Unlike Jeff earlier, Lisa and the viewer fixate on the right window, with the images Jeff saw in the site of *Being* falling into the discourse of the Other. In fact, Lisa must fixate on *Meaning*, since she must take Jeff's 'word for it', remaining outside the visual experience of the violence of the real that the left-side windows frame. After Lisa departs, Jeff's and the camera's focus on the living room window substitute for an esotropic 'crossing of



Jeff's Strabismus in Logical Time

Figure 2

as with the Thorwalds' own, is fraught with tensions and subtle cruelties.¹¹ Lisa wants to talk about marriage and the future, finding Jeff's fascination with someone else whose relationship appears finished totally frustrating:

Lisa: There's nothing to see!

Jeff: There *is* something! I've seen it through that window. I've seen bickering and family quarrels and mysterious trips at night and knives and saws and ropes and not since last evening a *sign* of the wife. All right, now you tell me where she is.

After this exchange, Lisa and Jeff watch Thorwald securing a large trunk with these "ropes." This image in the context of Jeff's speculations comes to *mean* "something" to Lisa, who treats the situation analytically:

11. Lisa complains, "Something's wrong with me," when talking about Jeff's romantic inattention. Thinking about something else, Jeff carelessly remarks, "Just how would you start to cut up a human body?" This moment in the film identifies Jeff's fantasies with Thorwald's suspicious actions, and moreover suggests that the "something" that is "wrong" remains *on this side* of the speaking subject's "me." And Jeff observes that even Lisa finds it "pretty hard to keep away from that word—murder," or that *ecstatic something-or-other which even this word seems inadequate to*.

the eyes' in Lacan's diagram: Jeff looks straight with one eye at the window corresponding to *Being*, and inward with the other eye, for the moment collapsing *Meaning* from the seen/scene and thus, all while touching a telephone receiver, courting destruction, much like Mrs. Thorwald, the last character to listen in on one of Lars's telephone conversations. Jeff, though, who earlier tells Lisa that attractive women "just [have] to *be*," may also want to maneuver Lisa into the circle that designates *Being*, so as to cut off discussion of the marriage symbolism that Lisa favors and disintegrate the alienating sexual differences, inimical to a real sense of 'completeness', that Jeff's erectile cast and Lisa's voguish fashions accentuate for the viewer.

These exchanges comprise "the whole set-up," to use Jeff's words, to a scene that underlines the film's representation of its own strabismal visual regime and also its fairly thorough re-envisioning of Lacan's *Seminar XI* diagram. This scene follows two delivery men who, after moving across the kitchen and living room, take the trunk in the bedroom that, Jeff assumes, contains Anna's corpse. The scene then cuts to a shot of Thorwald signing a form in the window corresponding to *Meaning*, thus to the mediation,

normalcy, and social commerce of word-representations. Hitchcock films these men's movement using an iris, a curious choice since Jeff watches them through binoculars, not the single eye of the telephoto camera. The iris must therefore suggest the monocular fixation characteristic of strabismus, as Jeff's 'iris' vision—maybe Jeff's unconscious—ineluctably strays once more to the left window. The film then cuts to Jeff and Stella, the two of them staring in the direction of the right window of Thorwald's apartment. After setting down the binoculars, though, Jeff subtly cocks one eye once again towards the left side of the apartment. The circle of *Meaning* for Jeff malfunctions, collapsing strabismus-like into the circle of *Being*. The wall¹² of the apartment complex across from Jeff's own window maps this splitting of vision over the film's *mise-en-scène* so as to recode in "logical time" the terms of Lacan's diagram and the dynamics of cinematographic voyeurism (figure 2).

This notion of logical time anatomizes the movement of Jeff's vision and its alternating fixation on the left or right windows in the film (*Four Concepts* 39-40). Jeff first *sees* into the windows corresponding to *Being*, the 'things' in them without signification until Jeff moves from the intermediate *non-meaning* of *understanding*—the combination of these 'things', their inconclusiveness (32), and the assumptions Jeff fills them with—to Jeff's *concluding* that these 'things' must *mean*, must insist on some narrative relevance. This last operation thus seems inocular¹³ in light of Jeff's strabismus: It describes the 'right eye's' attention to the unthinkable of the real, so that it cannot see straight or *normally* at times; and it also describes the transformation of the 'things' Jeff sees into symbolic representation, into the narrative facts, never actually seen, of Anna's murder in Jeff, Stella, Lisa, and the viewer's conscious reconstruction of it.

12. The last syllable of "Thorwald" sounds like "walled," and Lacan argues that "the path of the subject passes between the two walls of the impossible" (*Four Concepts* 167), the *tuche* with the real in the unconscious and the "indifference" of the drives in their spiraling towards ego-shattering enjoyment (168). Thorwald thus moves across the two walls that separate his apartment's kitchen, living room, and bedroom, and also the two walls that separate this apartment from Jeff's own. 'Walls', of course, also describe the vagina, with one of its myths, the vagina dentata, signifying Anna's earlier unmaning or 'castration' of Thorwald in the room corresponding to the circle of *Meaning*.

13. "Inocular," an almost forgotten term taken from the 1913 Webster's Dictionary, refers to the insertion of something into the corner of the eye. For example, Jeff's eyes see nothing intrinsically criminal in the right window of the Thorwalds' apartment, even while these eyes stray fantasmatically to the left *so as to 'shed light' on or rather insert a little of the vertiginously 'dark' real* on visual data that otherwise seem relatively innocuous. More than a case of Freudian projection, then, *Rear Window* suggests that all interpretation does a certain amount of violence to what we see in front of us, thus in turn de-solidifying what we think of our environs, our neighbors, and ourselves.

These characters suffer the molestation of the real that comes of a dangerous fascination with it, one that tampers with our fovea, distorting *Rear Window's* *mise-en-scène* and its imaging of the split subject. The film's denouement shows Jeff wearing two casts now, having fallen out of his apartment window in a climactic encounter with Thorwald. Lisa reads a fashion magazine while Jeff sleeps, confirming all at once their sexual distinctiveness, their alienation from *Being* in the symbolic, and their alienation from each other. Jeff sleeps for the moment, circumscribed in non-meaning, although *still on the verge*, in a sense, remaining close to Lisa, who represents marital impulses tending towards symbolic union or the securing of fragmentary things into meaningful code-structures. This union romanticizes the un-differentiation of the real, which, as Jeff's near-undoing suggests, emerges throughout the film as traumatic, impossible to consciously revisit, and resistant to a straightforward conceptualization (*Four Concepts* 51, 166-67). The viewer thus experiences with Jeff the strabismus of the film's sequencing, which returns our attention to the *Spaltung*, reminding us of the 'real facts', the cut in the subject that compromises self-knowledge, social interaction, and our own shifty fantasies *about what it is that we actually think we are seeing*.

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Gaze, Suture, Interface

The Suicide Scene in Michael Haneke's *Caché*



Seung-hoon Jeong

Georges (Daniel Auteuil), a host of a high-brow talk show, receives suspicious videotapes that display the peaceful façade of his upper middle class house. Nothing is clear in this CCTV footage in which there is ostensibly ‘nothing happening’: who has been watching his family, and why? Subsequent clips lead him to his childhood home and to an unknown apartment, which turns out to be the dingy place of his adopted, then abandoned, Algerian brother Majid (Maurice Bénichou). This forgotten ‘other’ confronts Georges with an uncomfortable truth from the past: young Georges’s jealousy forced Majid to be sent off to an orphanage, whereafter Majid had to survive without the

educational and social benefits given to Georges. The nature of the video thus changes from provocation to evocation, from surveillance to reminiscence. Michael Haneke’s *Caché* [*Hidden*] (2005) uncannily uncovers this hidden trauma that resurfaces in the present. But my primary question is simple: why video?

Let me call this video an ‘interface’. Technically meaning the contact surface between image and spectator, the notion can be applied to the camera, the filmstrip, and the screen. That such a cinematic interface appears onscreen might not merit discussion in many cases, but it can play a central role in the narrative, whose unity is often thwarted

and destabilized by the interface image. The subjectivity of characters or spectators can also be shaped or shaken through their encounters with the interface-within-the-film. A diegetic interface may then affect the ‘perception’ and ‘memory’ chain along which ‘image’ and ‘subjectivity’ are interconnected. *Caché* seems ideal for a case study in this regard, not only because of its video insertions, but because of the consequent revelation of perceptual and mnemonic mechanisms. What follows begins with a close analysis of a scene that exposes these mechanisms and thereby inspires us to explore, even expand the theoretical implications of the interface.

Among many significant scenes, I take Georges’s second visit to Majid’s flat as a kernel of the film’s structure. Its impressiveness, of course, bursts out of Majid’s sudden

childhood trauma staged in Georges’s nightmare: Majid kills a cockerel, which also leaves a sharp blood mark, and he approaches Georges with the bloody hatchet. This killing was in fact orchestrated by Georges, but he told his parents that Majid had wanted to scare him, a joking lie that, along with Majid’s tuberculosis, ultimately resulted in Majid’s expulsion. However, only through recurrent visual traces after the fact does that original scene manifest its latent meaning as Georges’s original sin. The question would be how guilty and responsible the child and/or adult Georges is for that tiny ‘twisted joke’ that had lifelong repercussions/consequences for Majid. One may conclude: “Georges’s refusal as an adult to acknowledge the effects of his earlier actions suggests a parallel with the postcolonial metropolitan who is neither wholly responsible for, nor wholly untainted by,

Georges is required to be a witness, a photographer, a living index to Majid’s death, just as Majid’s blood leaves its physical trace like a gigantic fingerprint.

suicide; Majid lets Georges in, talks for a second, takes out a knife as Georges slightly falters, and slits his own throat, leaving no room for anticipation. The abruptness of this action marks the abruptness of Majid’s emotion: a remarkable calmness and gentleness, not usually found in revenge suspects. It is rather Georges, the white Parisian intellectual, who has always lost his temper in front of his lower class, dark-skinned brother (and later, in front of Majid’s son, too); this Algerian outcast has reversed the standard image of the brutal invader of the bourgeois family like the De Niro figure in *Cape Fear* (Martin Scorsese, 1991). By killing himself, Majid releases something repressed beneath his tranquil face and fractures the peace of both his *banlieue* home and Georges’s bourgeois life. The flash of his blood sprayed onto the wall visualizes this fracture like an unstitched slash; the blood slowly exuding from his head onto the floor insinuates that this trauma will only grow like a nightmare in Georges’s memory.

In view of other scenes, Majid’s bloodstain on the wall triggers a *déjà-vu* that allows us to retroactively recognize the drawings sent to Georges (of a child vomiting blood) as forewarnings of this suicide. And through the same logic of ‘deferred action’ (Freudian *Nachträglichkeit*), this bloody event serves to repeat the film’s first instant flashback, prompted by a reverse-action tape, of young Majid coughing tubercular blood by a window, and the

past events from which he or she has benefited” (Ezra and Sillars 219).¹ Or, Majid’s suicide might bring a deep, if guilty, pleasure to a deeply ‘twisted’ xenophobe European: “the comforting idea that the colonial native can be made to disappear in an instant through the auto-combustive agency of their own violence” (Gilroy 234).

Rather than relying on these interpretations, I call attention to the fundamental cinematic mechanism that causes this hermeneutic turmoil around the colonial legacy. The first element that even formalist reviewers miss is the apparently insignificant dialogue. After entering the flat, Georges asks what Majid wants, and hears: “I truly had no idea about the tapes.” Georges asks again: “Is that all?” Then, Majid utters his last words: “I called you because I wanted you to be present.” Georges is required to be a witness, a photographer, a living index to Majid’s death, just as Majid’s blood leaves its physical trace like a gigantic fingerprint. Indexicality marks the ontological essence of this Bazinian sequence shot with two oppositional beings, and furthermore, triggers another deferred action. This time, however, the event does not signal the past but the

1. This *Screen* issue referenced has a dossier on *Caché*, with most of the authors taking the postcolonial perspective with the reference to the 1961 event—a hidden massacre of hundreds of Algerians which later brought the Algerian war to metropolitan France.

future, wherein Majid seems to call out from beyond the grave: 'Look at me dying like the cockerel, and suffer from your presence at my death when this moment haunts you like a ghost'. How could this present moment appear in the future as the return of the past? A hidden camera! Surely, this still long take, framed as a static long shot, hints at a surveillant gaze which seems to offer the true meaning of Majid's will: 'I actually wanted you to be present in front of the camera that will send you a tape showing your very presence at my death'. Thus Georges is not the witnessing subject, but the object witnessed by a faceless subject, not an index-maker but an index-image itself.

Nonetheless, we remain unsure of the hidden camera not only because of Majid's strong denial of its presence, but because of the fact that his supposedly recorded suicide is not actually delivered to Georges until the end of the film. The circumstances of this video's delivery to Georges are opposite to those surrounding a previous 'surprise' video, sent to him directly after his first visit. The previous video, (which recorded Georges's first visit to Majid and then Majid's sobbing after Georges's departure) had the same static, surveillant set-up as the suicide video. But Haneke made it clear to us during that first visit that there was no camera(man) present, since all sides of Majid's flat could be seen in the background through shot/reverse-shot exchanges. One could imagine a tiny unrecognizable camera, but the opening scene video was shot from the position of someone who must have stood on the street and fixed a conventional camera firmly on a tripod (though this cameraman is also improbably invisible).

Undoubtedly, this impossible gaze is the aesthetic target of many debates surrounding the film. Libby Saxton, for instance, takes a Deleuzian approach to the offscreen space incubating this hidden gaze. What Deleuze defines as the 'virtual' out-of-field is "a more disturbing presence, one which cannot even be said to exist, but rather to 'insist' or 'subsist', a more radical Elsewhere, outside homogeneous space and time" (30).² In *Caché*, we experience this radical invisible field through its visible counterpart, the video, while this "interface between offscreen and onscreen space becomes the locus of concerns about personal and collective trauma, guilt and responsibility" (Saxton 6). At this point, however, we should ask what this 'interface' really means. By exploring the term more specifically, we can also elaborate on offscreen space and its function. For this task, I will take my cue from the Žižekian usage of interface in his remodeling of suture theory—a remodeling

2. Before discussing Deleuze, Saxton introduces a mini-history of the discourse on offscreen space: from André Bazin's window metaphor and Noël Burch's 'actual' offscreen space to Pascal Bonitzer's "field of blindness" including the production space ("an 'anti-classical' hors-champ which is discontinuous with and heterogeneous to the space on the screen").

that I wish to in turn reconceptualize. The concept that needs an archeological detour is not offscreen space so much as suture, for suture relates to both offscreen and onscreen space.

Suture as Meta-suture or De-suture

The concept of suture was crucial in the heyday of 1970s theory (Silverman 193-236; Rodowick 180-220). Semiotically, as Žižek says, suture is defined as the process by which "the 'absent one' is transferred from the level of enunciation to the level of diegetic fiction" (32). Enunciation designates the process of producing diegesis in which the producer, the enunciator, is not seen, but this absence does not unsettle the spectator because almost every shot appears to be taken from a certain character's perspective as if he were the very enunciator of the previous or following shot. Georges's first visit to Majid replays such a classical example of suture: the objective shot of Georges raises the question ('from whose subjective point of view is this filmic enunciation given?'), which is smoothly and swiftly answered through its reverse-shot showing Majid (the 'absent enunciator' turns into a diegetic figure). Suture designates this turning point through which "the difference between image and its absence/void is mapped onto the intra-pictorial difference between the two shots" (Žižek 33). In semiotic-psychoanalytic terms, every different shot—not only in the shot and reverse-shot exchange but also in the editing process as a whole—results from the suture of the invisible externality into the chain of visible shots as 'symbolic' signifiers; it thereby keeps stable and seamless the diegesis as an 'imaginary' world so that spectators, for the most part, hardly recognize this mechanism in the middle of identification with characters and immersion into narrative space. It is ultimately the spectator's subjectivity that is unconsciously sutured into this unified imaginary reality, the subjectively signifying world woven through objective audiovisual signifiers.

Žižek's intervention occurred when, after its hegemony had declined, 'suture' became vague jargon synonymous with 'closure' that yields the totality of a structure. In order to reinvigorate this outmoded buzzword, he brings to light the initial radical difference between the onscreen image and the offscreen void. For the threatening intrusion of the latter, the decentering Other, the Absent Cause, can leave its trace onscreen as if not completely sutured. An apparently objective shot turns out to be a subjective one or vice versa in the suturing process, but as often seen in Hitchcock, we can encounter an inhuman gaze or a monstrous evil that embodies "the impossible/traumatic subjectivity of the Thing itself" (Žižek 38). The burning Bodega Bay with birds gliding over it in *The Birds* (1963) appears to be shot

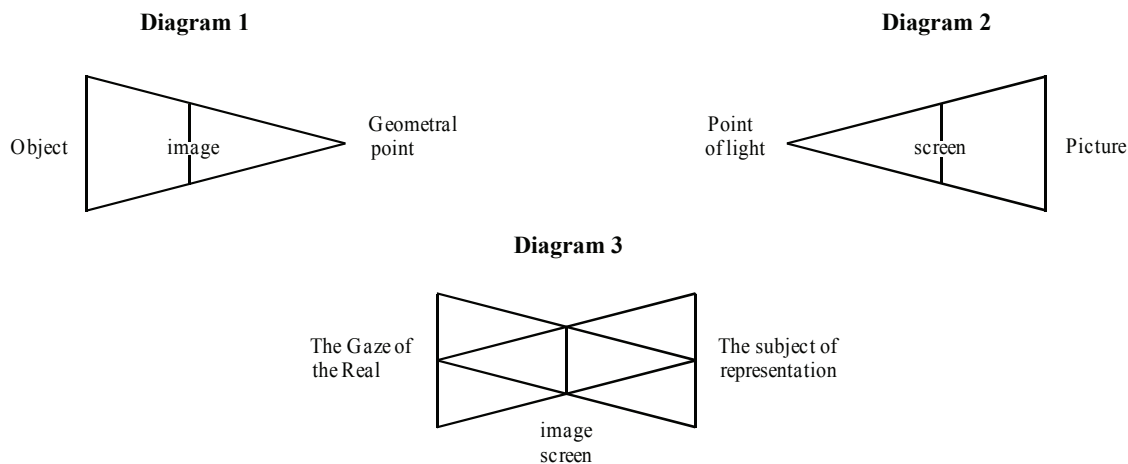
neither objectively nor subjectively, but semi-subjectively. The invisible Thing can also intrude into a shot, leaving “a blot of the Real” like a bird’s attack on Melanie. If standard suture creates a seamless, illusionist narrative space and illusory reality, Žižek’s late-Lacanian version reveals that the Imaginary-Symbolic conjunction cannot always efface the seam, leaving the trace of the un-symbolized Real which abruptly emerges like a Lacanian stain. Suture thus no longer functions as the undetectable mechanism of signifying representation, but as the unconcealed symptom of its own failure. It is the onscreen appearance of the Real itself, the visualization of the rupture of the suture as such. Conversely, those birds look like a sutured form of the Real, as it were, a ‘slashing’ suture within the ‘slick’ suture.

What Žižek calls “interface” concerns a more specific case, distinct from the material cinematic component described at the outset of the paper. Žižek’s version indicates a screen within the screen serving as “the direct stand-in

objective reality constituted from our subjective viewpoint and the traumatic Real outside this ordinary reality.

Neither subjective nor objective, the *interface as suture* therefore appears in the convolution of reality and the Real. In view of Lacan’s well-known diagrams on vision (Lacan 105-35), does this short-circuit not take place when two triangles overlap each other as shown in the third diagram below?

In diagram 1, the “Object” (Thing) is sutured into the “image” by our subjective act of seeing and symbolizing it from the “Geometral point” (eye). In diagram 2, the “Point of light” (the Gaze of the Real) positions us a priori in the “Picture” (our visual field) from which we see, while it is hidden behind the “screen” as a veil of the Gaze. And in diagram 3, the “Gaze of the Real” is sensed in the visual field of the “subject of representation” when the “image” functions as the “screen” of the Real in their short-circuit.



for the ‘absent one’” mostly appearing in the form of “a simple condensation of shot and reverse-shot within the same shot” (52). A typical example of this is the beginning of *Blue* (Krzysztof Kieslowski, 1993) when the object of Julie’s look, a doctor, appears as a reflection in her own eye. Such a reflected image then loses its sense of reality, as if to visualize the spectral, fantastic Real. That is, an interface is a ‘meta-suturing’ or, I would say, ‘de-suturing’ image surface within a shot that self-reflexively visualizes the imperfection of classical suture by ‘directly’ suturing the Real. Claiming that “an interface-artificial moment must suture-stitch [the Real],” Žižek in effect *re-sutures* the notion of suture into film theory in terms of ‘meta-suture’ or ‘de-suture’ that divulges and thereby thwarts the traditional suture itself. Hence, there is what he calls the “short-circuit” that operates on two levels: (1) as a semiotic short-circuit between the Imaginary-Symbolic coalition that produces reality effects and the external Real that is still inaccessible to the subject; (2) as a psychoanalytic short-circuit between

Apparently dialectical, this schema, however, has nothing to do with the standard version of the Hegelian flowchart of thesis-antithesis-synthesis. What counts is not continuous reciprocity or equal correspondence between the Gaze and the subject’s eye, but rather their radical disjunction or nondialectic asymmetry. At the moment of suture becoming de-suture, the overlap of the “image” with the “screen” is virtually the replacement of the former with the latter. The eye is already encompassed or preceded by the Gaze which, never directly looked at by us, is only vaguely sensed when directly sutured in an imaged form of the gaze little-g (as derived from but opposed to the Gaze)—in other words, a visible interface.³ The interface appears as this uneven merge of *image-screen*, making us realize that

3. To enhance clarity despite possible reductionism, I draw further attention to this distinction, which Žižek does not make, between the Gaze with a capital G and the gaze little g. The former is the pure, invisible Real, the latter its visualized form, an imaged signifier in reality. This distinction would be necessary and effective in locating an onscreen interface-gaze through which we could sense the unlocatable pure Gaze.

our subjective eye is ‘asymmetrically’ conditioned by the immanent status of the Gaze which constitutes our visual field. We *see* and *are* within this field without *seeing* the *being* of its hidden Gaze until an interface hints that we have *been seen* by that very Gaze.

“I am photographed before I photograph”

To return to the initial question on *Caché*: why video? It is now clear that the video as an image-screen incarnates such a perceptual and ontological interface in the properly medium-specific sense of the term. When the opening outdoor image (Shot A) suddenly reappears on the TV Georges watches (Shot B), the latter functions not as a reverse-shot, but as an ‘interface-shot’ with the former sutured into it: a condensation of shot and reverse-shot. Sutured in the form of the video-interface, the outside of the house or, say, the external Real invades the inside of Georges’s reality. The crux of the Žižekian suture (which Žižek himself does not highlight) is that it opens this ‘outside’ within the diegesis (and not the extradiegetic space of filmmaking). As the objective Shot A turns out to be a subjective shot, it must have been shot not directly from the viewpoint of the external enunciator (i.e. the ‘seamless’ director), but primarily from the viewpoint of an internal

matter of perception and representation. The pure Gaze immanent in Shot A seems sutured into Shot B as a diegetic gaze, yet this in turn only becomes the object of the other character-subject’s look as Georges watches it. The unverified subject persists as nothing but the inhuman Gaze itself. So when we say the objective Shot A turns into a subjective one, this subjectivity should rather be attributed to characters (and spectators) whose view of reality would fit such a normal perspective of the house; the image taken from the ‘geometral point’ of the ‘subject of representation’. On the contrary, the unseen subject who shot this video turns out to be an ‘asubjective’ agent of the Gaze which belongs to the ‘real’ objectivity beyond Georges’s and our field of vision. The intradiegetically external viewpoint only hints that there might be no human character to occupy this position except for a non-anthropomorphized camera-eye as such.

While *Caché* plays a ‘mind-game’ *vis-à-vis* the question of whether or not we see Georges’s house in Shot A from within someone’s mind, the film provokes a deeper feeling that “*I myself* [i.e. the film’s narrator through whom I see the film, my stand-in in the film] *do not exist*” (Žižek 67). Insofar as suture theory concerns spectatorship, suturing as interfacing with the Real does not perfectly suture spectators within the diegetic space, but leaves them wandering



Shot A

enunciator as a diegetic character who is exterior to all other characters. That is, the video producer can be identified neither as Majid nor his son—who also persistently denies Georges’s suspicion—but only as somebody else in the ‘marginal’ narrative space that no other character enters and in the ‘liminal’ narrative time that lingers in the back of the main character’s memory. While not belonging to the main diegesis, s/he remains ‘intradiegetic’.

More uniquely, this hidden character manifests neither as a pseudo-subject like an animal or ghost, nor as “standard Gothic elements (apparitions in the fog, magic mirrors)” (Žižek 39); instead, it lingers as an image surface of ordinary reality, which persists in complicating the



Shot B

around the unsutured Gaze. They are invited to perceive the fictional world through the eyes of an ‘experiencing consciousness’, yet this consciousness is not embodied but disembodied. One may say that it is a moral consciousness or super-ego of sorts, a lingering remnant in the back of Georges’s consciousness that is always watching, always terrorizing with its demands. As Georges’s reality of well-being is constituted only through a certain loss of reality, an exclusion of the traumatic Real, the video interfaces with this loss of the Real while also making him realize that what he sees is constituted only through what he cannot see. The same is true of the spectator, whose gaze is sutured not as belonging to a subject-character with whom to identify,

but only as becoming the object of the character's look: Georges's diegetic eye that is already both penetrated and surrounded by the invisible Gaze. "Gaze is the condition of possibility of the eye, i.e. of our seeing something in the world (we only see something insofar as an X eludes our eye and 'returns the Gaze')" (Žižek 65).⁴ Lacan says, "I am *photo-graphed*" (by the Point of light) (121), and I add, 'before I photograph' (from my geometral point).

The suicide scene ultimately refers to the existence of this Gaze whose empty position spectators assume, while it retroactively proves its unsuturability—the resistance of this Gaze to being sutured into reality. More notable, however, is the fact that suture takes place only through the material interface, the hygienic high-tech surface of a shadowless image; the suicide shot looks like, and functions as, a 'quasi-interface' about which we are still uncertain as to whether it is just filmic narration or another would-be inset video. This is the case with the penultimate shot of Georges's apparent dream (followed by his going to bed)—a fixed extreme long shot of his past presence at Majid's traumatic expulsion from the family. It is unclear whether or not the camera position of this shot indicates young Georges's position at the moment, or whose point of view it is that restages this 'primal scene', if neither Georges's nor the director's himself. We could say the Gaze might



Shot C

be internalized in the unconscious of Georges who sends himself a quasi-interface flashback video. But the question only becomes more unsolvable through a 'false connection' to the film's ending (i.e. without any coherence but some uncanny noise continuing)—Majid's son, the only suspect who might have been shooting this footage of Georges's son's school, surprisingly though almost indiscernibly, enters the frame and talks to Georges's son in extreme long shot (Shot C). In order to identify and interpret this visual,

4. Libby Saxton reaches this point as well, though not via Lacan-Žižek. "[O]ur blind spots – not only to personal and collective traumas [...] but also to the sites of non-seeing which structure cinema and spectatorship [...] the margins of blindness, which frame and limit our look, but are also, it suggests, a condition of our seeing" (15).

semantic conundrum,⁵ it is we the audience who must now replay this quasi-interface shot. It also confronts us with our theatre space which may in fact resemble the stairway, with some people still seated and others exiting at the moment the credits close the film. Doesn't this interface-screen, then, return the hidden Gaze like a mirror of our physical body if not of our fictional desire?

In brief, *Caché* gears sociopolitical and psychoanalytical hermeneutics into the ontology and epistemology of the media/image. It carries the 'whodunit' semiotics based on the communication/enunciation model to an extreme of perception theory. The interface is given as the only possible threshold through which the Gaze is sutured in front of the human look; the latter senses the unsuturable, unsutured former in its own reflexive/retroactive circuit. This is a distorted feedback of two different perceptions—the Gaze and the eye—which are contingently encountered, asymmetrically exchanged, and unfairly renegotiated. So, too, are two different memories entailing deferred actions—memory of the Real and memory in reality—as Georges's once sutured memory about Majid is reopened like the bloody gash at the moment Majid's knife rips through his skin. We only see the (quasi-)interfacial image-screen, but without it we could have no epistemological chance to consider the ontological Gaze that conditions our seeing and being. If Majid embodies a certain agency, it would be less the self-demolition of France's former colony than the inherent disequilibrium between two sides of the interface, their *asymmetrical mutuality*. *Caché* brilliantly discloses how subjectivity is structured in this interfaciality, the inner mechanism of our perceptual and mnemonic lives.

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5. Is Majid's son threatening Georges's son, or rather conspiring with him to play a trick on Georges? If the latter is the case, is this the end of the storyline, or rather its beginning that even precedes the opening scene?

C I N E P H I L E P R E S E N T S

THE NEW SCENE CANON

Apocalypse Now (1979) – "Charlie don't surf" • Alien (1979) – "Chestbuster" • Manhattan (1979) – "Planetarium" • Raging Bull (1980) – "Jake Coulda Been a Contender" • The Shining (1980) – "Wendy, I'm home" • The Warriors (1980) – "Come out and plaaaaay" • Chariots of Fire (1981) – "Wings on our Heels" • Mommie Dearest (1981) – "NO WIRE HANGERS!!!" • Scanners (1981) – "Head Explosion" • Raiders of the Lost Ark (1981) – "Runaway Boulder" • Blade Runner (1982) – "But then again, who does?" • Tootsie (1982) – "My name is dorothy" • Scarface (1983) – "Say hello to my little friend" • This is Spinal Tap (1984) – "These ones go to 11" • The Pope of Greenwich Village (1984) – "Charlie! They took my thumb!" • The Breakfast Club (1985) – "You just bought yourself another Sunday" • Ran (1985) – "Storming of the Castle" • Tampopo (1985) – "So you're at a movie too?" • Ferris Bueller's Day Off (1986) – "Parade" • Blue Velvet (1986) – "Hit me" • The Fly (1986) – "Seth's Transformation" • Platoon (1986) – "Shiiit you gotta be rich in the first place to think like that" • Full Metal Jacket (1987) – "Vietnam, the Movie" • The Killer (1987) – "Church Shootout" • Raising Arizona (1987) – "Huggies Chase" • Wall Street (1987) – "Greed is good" • Akira (1988) – "Motorcycle Chase" • The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover (1989) – "Try the cock, it's a delicacy" • Do The Right Thing (1989) – "Riot in Bed-Stuy" • Say Anything (1989) – "Boombox" • GoodFellas (1990) – "Copacabana Long Take" • Edward Scissorhands (1990) – "Ice Carving" • Silence of the Lambs (1991) – "It puts the lotion on its skin" • The Player (1992) – "I hate all this cut, cut, cut" • Boyz n the Hood (1991) – "Either they don't know, don't show, or don't care about what's going on in the hood" • Basic Instinct (1992) – "Uncrossing of Legs" • Bad Lieutenant (1992) – "Show me how you suck a guy's cock" • Unforgiven (1992) – "Will vs. Bill" • Reservoir Dogs (1992) – "Stuck in the Middle With You" • Dazed and Confused (1993) – "Girls stay the saaaaaame age" • Groundhog Day (1993) – "Phil's morning x 3650" • Pulp Fiction (1994) – "Royale with cheese" • The Shawshank Redemption (1994) – "Prison Escape" • Clerks (1994) – "The Quick Stop" • Se7en (1995) – "What's in the box?!" • Casino (1995) – "Head in a Vice" • Heat (1995) – "Holy Shit Street Shootout" • Kids (1995) – "Skateboard Beating" • Irma Vep (1996) – "Film Within the Film" • Hard Core Logo (1996) – "Suicide Scene" • Fargo (1996) – "Woodchipper" • Trainspotting (1996) – "Worst Toilet in Scotland" • Chungking Express (1996) – "California Dreamin'" • The Sweet Hereafter (1997) – "Sarah Polley's Big Reveal" • Good Will Hunting (1997) – "Going to see about a girl" • Funny Games (1997) – "Killer Wink" • Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas (1998) – "White Rabbit" • The Thin Red Line (1998) – "One man in all this madness" • American History X (1998) – "Curb Scene" • Rushmore (1998) – "Max Montage" • Out of Sight (1998) – "Nonlinear Sex Scene" • The Big Lebowski (1998) – "The Jesus" • Saving Private Ryan (1998) – "Omaha Assault" • Boogie Nights (1999) – "Sister Christian" • The Matrix (1999) – "Morpheus Rescue and Bullet Time" • Magnolia (1999) – "One Is the Loneliest Number" • Fight Club (1999) – "Skyscraper Explosion with Pixies and Penis" • Being John Malkovich (1999) – "Malkovich! Malkovich! Malkovich!" • The Virgin Suicides (1999) – "Asphyxiation Party" • Beau Travail (1999) – "Rhythm of the Night Dance" • Julien Donkey-Boy (1999) – "Black albino straight from Alabama" • Requiem for a Dream (2000) – "Ass to Ass Montage" • Traffic (2000) – "Rescuing Caroline" • Memento (2000) – "Beginning/End" • Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon (2000) – "Bamboo Forest" • Almost Famous (2000) – "Tiny Dancer" • Maelström (2000) – "Good Morning Starshine" • The Royal Tenenbaums (2001) – "She Smiled Sweetly in the Tent" • Mulholland Drive (2001) – "Silencio" • Amelie (2001) – "Seren-dipity Montage" • Donnie Darko (2001) – "Mad World" • Ghost World (2001) – "Defunct Bus Line" • Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner (2001) – "Running through the snow" • Russian Ark (2002) – "All of It" • Adaptation (2002) – "We open at the beginning of time" • The Hours (2002) – "Come to bed" • Far From Heaven (2002) – "Diner Dance" • Oldboy (2003) – "Can the imaginary training of fifteen years be put to use?" • Goodbye Lenin (2003) – "Mother's First Outing" • Kill Bill: Vol. 1 (2003) – "House of Tea Leaves" • Talk to Her (2003) – "Silent Movie" • The Barbarian Invasions (2003) – "Chasing the Dragon" • The Saddest Music in the World (2003) – "America vs. Serbia" • Lost in Translation (2003) – "Bob and Charlotte's Secret Whisper" • The Downfall (2004) – "Hitler Freaks Out" • The Passion of Christ (2004) – "Jesus' Whipping" • The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou (2004) – "The Jaguar Shark" • Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (2004) – "Joel in Little Joel's Memories" • Grizzly Man (2005) – "Jewel, you must never listen to this" • The Proposition (2005) – "Christmas with a Shotgun" • Pan's Labyrinth (2006) – "The Pale Man" • Children of Men (2006) – "Ghetto Uprising" • Little Children (2006) – "Pedophile in the Pool" • No Country for Old Men (2007) – "Coin Toss" • There Will Be Blood (2007) – "I Drink Your Milkshake!" • Aqua Teen Hunger Force Colon Movie Film for Theaters (2007) – "Viewing Etiquette Intro" • The Dark Knight (2008) – "Nurse Joker" • The Wrestler (2008) – "Ram Jam!" • WALL-E (2008) – "Sublime Opening" • Up (2009) – "Sublime Opening"





In keeping with our commitment to exploring cinema's newfound place within the culture of convergence and new media, Cinephile would like to inaugurate "The New Scene Canon" – an ongoing project that catalogues the most influential and iconic scenes of the last 30 years. We invite scholars to write 1000–2000 words on scenes they consider deserving of canonization. Writers are welcome to choose from our preliminary list, or propose their own scene. Articles, along with embedded video, will be hosted on cinephile.ca, and a selection will be featured in forthcoming print issues.





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