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Bits and Pieces: Brutality in Millennial Horror Films and French Art Cinema

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Bits and Pieces: Brutality in Millennial Horror Films and French Art Cinema

By

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B.A., University of South Carolina, 2007

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An abstract of
A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the
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Abstract

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By Matthew Boyd Smith

This thesis examines a new strain of brutality in American and French horror films in the 2000s. It also takes into account the films of the "new extremism," a nebulous term and loosely-conceived cycle of films which has at one point or another included not just the acknowledged art cinema which now makes up its corpus, but also new French horror films. Utilizing aesthetic strategies which cross the boundaries of expectation in both the art cinema and the horror genre, these films repulse and brutalize their audiences into exhaustion.

I posit that millennial horror films in the United States and France as well as the films of the new extremism serve as allegorical representations of cultural anxieties of an international image culture inundated with images of torture and terrorism, and as texts which are designed to repulse us by playing on those anxieties.

The first chapter examines the interplay between art and horror in reception, using as case studies Georges Franju's *Eyes Without a Face* (1959), Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* (1960), and Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960). This trio of films anchors the discussion of art and horror that makes up the bulk of chapters two and three. The second chapter focuses on the new extremism and its ties to horror, and the third on the development of a new brutality in American and French horror films. The aim of the third chapter's concluding discussion is to broaden the project of the thesis to account for similar strains of brutality and explicit gore in a variety of media in the 2000s, not just in films which could be classified within the generic parameters of the horror film.

Overall, the thesis provides a unique conceptualization of the distinctions between millennial horror films and the films the new extremism as irrelevant. By working within the same generic histories and trafficking in similar images in order to repulse their audiences, these films work through anxieties which could only have arisen around the turn of the millennium, with the rise of a truly global image culture on the internet.

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Finally, I dedicate this thesis to my mother, Lynn Rowell, without whom literally none of this process would have been possible. May it always be “Midnight Madness” when we’re together.

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Introduction

In 2003 I went to see the remake of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Marcus Nispel) with a group of friends. After the film, one of them declared it to be the last time she would ever watch a horror movie in a theater. She was so disgusted, assaulted and overwhelmed by the film's explicit gore and relentless brutality that she could never imagine undergoing such an experience ever again. I too felt exhausted and brutalized. I began thinking about how Nispel's film functioned in relation to the original film, which as a fan of the horror genre, I was very familiar with.

I have seen Tobe Hooper's 1974 *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* a number of times and have a great fondness for it. It is disturbing, assaultive, and can even be called offensive. The offensiveness of a film can emanate from a number of areas such as its content or subject matter, its ineptness (the film can be poorly made), or in the way it treats its audience. Mikita Brottman asserts that the 1974 film is offensive because it "transgresses the structure and traditions of a genre."[1] Her main argument is that "most traditional horror films share the functions of the fairy tale in that they serve to teach their (mainly adolescent) audience of the dangerous consequences of inappropriate sexual (and other) behavior, thereby working as a ritual process of acculturation for the modern adolescent."[2] *Texas Chainsaw* inverts this function and upsets the ritual order of the fairy tale. It shifts

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[1] Mikita Brottman, *Offensive Films* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005), 97.
[2] Ibid., 97.
[3] Ibid., 98.
[4] Ibid., 102.
[5] Ibid., 107.
[6] Ibid., 107.
[7] James Quandt, who is the first critic to write about the new extremism in French cinema, in fact

focus from the dangerous consequences of inappropriate behavior (though nonetheless retaining this function of the horror film in some form) to what Brottman calls an overwhelming sense of apocalyptic dread, which "serves to mislead, misdirect, and confuse its audience in a bewildering nightmare of violence and bloodshed."[3]

The remake does not mislead, misdirect or confuse its audience. If anything, it overwhelms them, assaults them, and on some level repulses them. One of the most significant changes made in the 2003 iteration is the use of explicit gore. The original film actually traffics in implied violence. That film's most notorious scene, where Pam is hung on a meat hook in the cannibalistic family's kitchen, cuts away before the moment of penetration, showing only her body falling down and her grasping at the hook as she hangs there. The only time we actually see a sharp object puncture or tear flesh is at the end of the film when the killer Leatherface falls to the ground and cuts into his own thigh with the chainsaw while chasing Sally through the woods.

Despite audience testimony that it is among the most explicit films they have ever seen, the 1974 film achieves the effect of explicitness through the use of documentary-like aesthetics which are mostly a by-product of the production's low budget. Brottman points to the opening voice-over which tells us that what we are about to see is based on true events, and to the specification of an exact date on screen as further indications that the film is trafficking in documentary style.[4]

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[3] Ibid., 98.
[4] Ibid., 102.

The film's visual aesthetics also connote a certain mode of documentary film, owing largely to the Eclair 16mm camera and low-speed film used to shoot it, giving it a shot-on-the-run look and feel. The film has a raw, grainy look. The remake does not.

The 2003 *Texas Chainsaw* keeps the opening narration, including the use of a precise date for the film's events, and adds footage at the end that we are told was taken by police officers at the family's house which approximates the look of 16mm B&W film, and is accompanied by further voice-over informing us that Thomas Hewitt (the family's name in the remake) is still on the loose. Aside from these elements, however, there is no doubt that the film has a big Hollywood budget, with a high-gloss visual style and high production value. The first film produced by Michael Bay's newly formed company Platinum Dunes, Texas Chainsaw '03 was shot with Arriflex 435s and Panaflex Millennium cameras on 35mm Eastman Kodak film stock, producing a noticeably polished and higher quality image than that provided by the 16mm of the original production.

In the remake, limbs are severed in detail, blood spurting and flesh pulling away from them. There is an elaborate camera movement through the gaping gunshot wound left in the head of a corpse. One of the characters, Andy, has his lower leg amputated by Leatherface in explicit detail, the camera lingering on the limb as it lies in the grass. The infamous meat hook, now going into Andy's back instead of one of the girls, is actually shown entering flesh. But most striking is

the removal of the original film's most memorable and disturbing sequences: the dinner at which Sally is forced to sit with the cannibalistic Sawyer clan.

This scene, according to Brottman, disturbs and provokes because of its protracted length and its inversion of ritual. The table and chairs, decorated with and even made from human remains, mock ritualistic burial traditions in which human remains may have "some regenerative symbolic significance."[5] Here the remains are reduced to mere objects - tables and chairs and decorations - "showing existence drained of all value."[6] While in 1974 the scene was part and parcel of the disturbing and assaultive nature of the film, it has since become a familiar motif of the modern horror film, relentlessly copied, parodied and referenced.

As a result, I believe the dinner scene is now seen as camp. That the scene comes off this way now, nearly forty years after the film's release, is in line with several prominent genre theories, including Rick Altman and Thomas Schatz's ideas of generic evolution, which sees a genre enter a phase of reflexivity as it matures. A remake would in effect shed itself of this reflexivity because it has shed elements of the previous film's recognizable elements and become something different.

In 2003, *Texas Chainsaw* becomes something different by adopting different aesthetics and changing its narrative formula. The final chase scene is prolonged when Erin, the remake's equivalent of Sally, flees the Hewitt house

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[5] Ibid., 107.
[6] Ibid., 107.

and escapes to the condemned slaughter house where the family used to make their living. By the time Erin finally escapes from Leatherface, the chase has become exhausting for the viewer, not only because of its duration, but also because there is no shortage of jump-scares, loud noises and bombastic music on the soundtrack, and gruesome objects in nearly every shot. And even after she escapes, Erin is driven into a final encounter with the sheriff (also the head of the Hewitt family, another change from the original), whom she kills by running him over with a car multiple times.

The sense of apocalyptic dread noted by Brottman in the original film I think points to a salient difference between the two films. The tone of the remake is one of nihilism, which is related to, yet separate from the apocalyptic dread found in the original. This is in part due to the lack of a unifying sense of the fairy tales Brottman notes as central to the narrative structure of the film. In effect apocalyptic dread, despite its evocation of "existence drained of all value," still falls within a ritualistic or natural order - the apocalypse can only be presaged. Nihilism in contrast denotes the total rejection of laws and institutions, bucking the established orders within which an apocalypse might even be a possibility. This tonal difference is shown through the overwhelming brutality of the violence the remake forces upon the audience.

Explicitness and endurance become the overarching theme of the film, pushing the viewer beyond discomfort into the realm of disgust. The remake of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* lengthens its sequences of murder and

mutilation much beyond that of the original film, adopting the protraction of time as an aesthetic strategy from the art film. This thesis addresses the various intersections of the art cinema with the horror film at the turn of the 21st Century.

In the art film, as in horror, the length of time an image is shown, or an event takes place, can be important for conveying terror, disgust, and shock. The duration of an explicit act shown in the film can also be accentuated and emphasized by the soundtrack. Loud music, mostly low brooding tones, and the revving of the chainsaw accompany the protracted ending of the Texas Chainsaw remake. Metallic clanging is also a prominent sound in this sequence, as Erin's escape through the slaughterhouse has her encounter many dangling chains, metal lockers where the workers used to keep things while on shift, and the metal-on-metal sound of a meat cleaver missing its fleshy target. The sickening wet sounds of weapons entering flesh are also part of the soundtrack during this sequence and many others, adding to the overall experience of brutal and explicit violence. The overall effect of this soundtrack, which is mixed very loud in addition to containing a constant barrage of noise, is of exhaustion. Much as the length of exposure to certain images can wear a viewer out, so too can the aural assaults of loud noises and brooding musical scores.

To demonstrate this point further with an example from the art cinema, take the opening of Gaspar Noé's 2002 film *Irréversible*. A couple of guys are followed into a noisy underground sex/dance club and beat a man to death with a fire extinguisher. The entire sequence plays out in what seems like a single shot

with a handheld camera. The music is loud, droning electronica, and there are people engaged in all manner of sex acts whose sounds fill the audio track. The murder takes place in a medium shot, clearly showing one of the men smashing the victim's face repeatedly with the fire extinguisher until eventually his head caves in, leaving a gaping hole where moments before was a fully-formed human face. The assault on the man features no visible editing, and is surely the result of a combination of various special effects techniques. The overwhelming sound design of the sequence couples with the unbroken length of the beating to create an unsettling effect on the viewer.

In both the art cinema and the horror films of this period, as our examples of the *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* remake and *Irréversible* make clear, there is something about the duration of time and the visual explicitness of the image which has changed the way we experience these films. Each film explicitly shows its violence and brutality to the audience. The scene from Noé's film described above, removed from narrative context, would not be out of place in Nispel's remake of *Texas Chainsaw*. The distinction between art and horror seems at this point blurred, though this is not a position adopted by the majority of critics, scholars or fans. What this further illustrates is that it eventually becomes very difficult for even scholars and critics to distinguish between the horror and art films being produced in France at this time.[7]

[7] James Quandt, who is the first critic to write about the new extremism in French cinema, in fact conflates the two from the outset, including Alexandre Aja's *Haute Tension* (2003) in a group which otherwise features the cream of the French art house set, including Claire Denis, Catherine Breillat and Gaspar Noé.

Films produced in France and the United States that share aesthetics as delineated above and which are typically defined along generic boundaries will be the primary focus of this thesis. While the claims made about these aesthetics and their usage may broaden into other types of films and even into other types of media, the parameters of our discussion are bounded by certain definitions of genre and cycles as applied to the art film and the horror film.

The assaultive effect of these aesthetics is noted repeatedly in reviews of various French art films of the late-90s and early 2000s, including *Irréversible*, *Trouble Every Day* (Claire Denis, 2001), *I Stand Alone* (Noé, 1998), and *In My Skin* (Marina de Van, 2002), which are often grouped loosely under the designation "the new extremism." In an article originally published in *Artforum* called "Flesh and Blood: Sex and Violence in Recent French Cinema," James Quandt defines what he calls "the New French Extremity." Cataloguing a specific set of French films produced between the late-1990s and the early-2000s, Quandt derides the films' aesthetic approach as disgusting and largely worthless, below the status of the filmmakers producing them.[8] This essay, since anthologized, is the precursor to the categorization of films within the new extremism.

As defined by Tanya Horeck and Tina Kendall, the new extremism is "a diverse body of films that have attracted attention for their graphic and

[8] Quandt's term, "the New Extremity," was later adapted into "the new extremism" after the parameters of inclusion expanded to include a broader selection of films from many countries in Europe, as well as a handful made in the United States by auteurist filmmakers. These filmmakers, Lars von Trier and John Cameron Mitchell, as well as many more, will be discussed throughout the thesis where appropriate.

confrontational images of sex and violence, and which can be described as part of a trend towards a 'new extremism' in contemporary European filmmaking...the work of a range of French directors – including, for example, Catherine Breillat, Gaspar Noé, Bruno Dumont and Philippe Grandrieus – and to interrogate affinities with the work of European filmmakers such as Michael Haneke, Lukas Moodysson, Lars von Trier and Ulrich Seidl."[9] Horeck and Kendall attempt to rescue the films originally dismissed by Quandt and rehabilitate them back to their proper place within contemporary European art cinema.

What these two approaches to the new extremism demonstrate is that the categorization of something as part of the art cinema is largely a question of institutionalization by the critic and scholar. There is a long history within criticism of classifying films as art, which has been one of many strategies utilized by critics to elevate the status of cinema generally. This has its roots in the 50s and 60s, when auteurist theory was an overriding concern of much film criticism, driven first by the critics at *Cahiers du Cinéma*, primarily Francois Truffaut and later by American critic Andrew Sarris.

Alongside the critical strategy of identifying films as a work of art, reclassifying "low" films in order to rehabilitate the reputations of films within many different genres. According to Rick Altman, "the most durable ploy [of the critic] has been to attach cinema to the narrative and mythical roots implied by generic identification. Generic attribution raises the stakes of reviewing,

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[9] Tanya Horeck and Kendall, Tina, "Introduction," *The New Extremism in Cinema: From France to Europe*, ed. T. Horeck and T. Kendall (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 1.

connecting cinema to well-established, deeply rooted categories."[10] This is certainly true of the 1970s horror film, reflected in Mikita Brottman's book *Offensive Films*, but is equally true of Horeck and Kendall's rebuttal of Quandt's dismissal of the new extremism.

This conceptualization of film genres as something largely delineated through critical and scholarly discourse is central to the understanding of the classifications of the various films, which are the focus of this thesis. Central to my overriding argument is the irrelevance of actively separating the films under discussion into classifications of art films and horror films, though this does provide a convenient way to keep track of exactly which movies and their specific relationships with one another are. Thus, when I do refer to a film as belonging to the "art cinema" or to the "horror cinema," I am referring specifically to their typical categorization by critics.

Still, when I say that the horror films of the 2000s adopt particular aesthetics from the art cinema, I am also referring to the semantic/syntactic theory of generic categorization as outlined by Rick Altman. Both categories, "art" and "horror," can be applied broadly, but the films under discussion here also fall within very narrow parameters, identifiable within specific sub-generic and cyclic categories.

The first of these, the new extremism, should be obvious. Quandt says that the films are a noticeable tendency within the French art cinema. Horeck and Kendall apply the tendency more broadly, but still isolate it as a specific

[10] Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: BFI Publishing, 1999), 127.

movement within the international art cinema. The words with which the new extremism is described suggests a cycle of films produced within the generic category of the art film. When identifying films as part of the new extremism and the art film, I will be referring specifically to this understanding of the art film as a generic category.

Similarly, we must think of the American horror films under discussion as a cycle of various sub-genres. Generally speaking, the horror genre is not as coherently defined as one might initially assume. Brigid Cherry proposes that that one problem of the categorization of the horror film is that "it is not simply that there is a range of conventions that offers some degree of variation on a coherent, formulaic theme, ...but that this genre is marked by a sheer diversity of conventions, plots and styles."[11] Further, Cherry goes on to point out that the horror film has existed continually for quite a long time and "has fragmented into an extremely diverse set of sub-genres."[12]

This difficulty, due to these circumstances, is reflected in the issue categorizing the horror film at the turn of the millennium as discussed in this study. Since films from both the United States and France are accounted for, we must also account for a unifying element: a brutal aesthetics shared by the new extremism, intent on assaulting the audience, repulsing them and exhausting them.

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[11] Brigid Cherry, *Horror* (London: Routledge, 2009), 2.
[12] Ibid., 2.

Primarily, we will be looking at the American remake and torture porn cycles of the 2000s as they directly influence the emergence of a modern French horror film alongside the films of the new extremism in that country. Until the 2000s, France had virtually no history of bloody slasher films. That changed due to the emergence of not only the new extremism, but also the prominence of the American remake cycle internationally.

The American films were produced between, loosely, 2003 and 2007, with a few outlying texts made and released a year or two earlier or later in the cycle of these millennial horror films, signaling the upswing and eventual decline of their popularity. The French films appear within the same period of time and share many of the same influences as their counterparts in the U.S., but are also drawing upon the popularity of the American cycles and are legitimated within the French industry (at least to the point of being produced at all). They are also made in part because of their marketability in foreign markets (primarily the U.S.), and the new extremism's prominence as a trend within the international art cinema which is so inextricably tied to French film production and critical reputation.

The horror films produced in this timeframe are referred to variously as "the new horror," "the new brutality," "millennial horror," and so on. I will use the term "millennial horror" most frequently since it connotes a specific period of production and popularity, a cohesive sense of style, and it is attuned to a particular set of anxieties related to the 2000s. In some instances, when

conducive to the discussion of specific lineages within the horror genre, these sub-genres will be referred to by name in order to provide a greater snapshot of exactly what constitutes a millennial horror film.

Millennial horror films are representative of a cycle of production within the horror genre at the dawn of the new millennium in which the abject body is the point of focus. Much like the exploitation cycle of the 1970s in which many of these films have their roots, the brutal treatment of the body and its explicit, realistic destruction is mirrored in the assaultive treatment of their audiences. Films like *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Hostel* (Eli Roth, 2005), *Saw* (James Wan, 2004), *The Hills Have Eyes* (Alexandre Aja, 2006), *House of 1000 Corpses* (Rob Zombie, 2001), *Haute Tension* (Alexandre Aja, 2003), and *The Last House on the Left* (Dennis Iliadis, 2009) all feature a new, brutalizing aesthetics which affect not only the characters in the films, but also the audience itself. The films of the 1970s, of which many of these are direct remakes, as noted above, indulged in similar aesthetics, though there is a significant difference between them, which also refers back to Grønstad's discussion of the new extremism's "new kind of viscerality" and "physicality." Millennial horror films share as part of their lineage various sub-genres of the horror film: the meat movie, the splatter film, the slasher film, exploitation horror, the mondo film, and "torture porn." These films represent a coalescence of aesthetics from films within each of these categories. And yet, these millennial horrors are just as physically and viscerally new in the history of the horror genre as the new extremism is to the art cinema.

Millennial art and horror films trade in similar aesthetics. Of the art cinema, Asbjørn Grønstad writes, "it is as if their violent energy has burst through the membrane of the work to target the spectators themselves."[13] Violence bursting forth from a film and creating a feeling of assault and disgust in the audience is exactly the way these films are often discussed. The films are targeting the audience in some way. *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* remake was assaultive, exhausting, and ultimately off-putting for many people. The reaction to the murder's explicitness in *Irréversible* was similar. Many millennial horror films and films of the new extremism have been noted as making its audience feel brutalized.

Grønstad goes on to describe what he calls the "transgressive cinema" of this period, observing that these art films went beyond the "somewhat puerile objective" of simple endurance for the audience.[14] Instead, "it brought a new kind of viscerality to the form, a physicality more readily associated with mainstream movies and pornography. It put the body–more often than not in states of agony, ecstasy or abjection–center stage, and it seemed mischievously intent on triggering scandals."[15]

The physicality Grønstad mentions in relation to "mainstream movies and pornography" draws a direct relationship between the recent art cinema - the new extremism - and the horror film in terms of affect. The use of time and technology

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[13] Asbjørn Grønstad, *Screening the Unwatchable: Spaces of Negation in Post-Millennial Art Cinema* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 2.
[14] Ibid., 3.
[15] Ibid., 3.

in these films also connect the films in each category. Each genre (if we assume that the new extremism is a sub-genre or cycle of the art film) has as its goal the negative physical reaction of its audience. The films want to repulse and excite with their explicit scenes of sex and violence.

Part of this change in aesthetics and physicality has to do with technology. Whereas earlier films might rely on editing in order to show a particularly gruesome death, advances in computer generated imagery (CGI) have provided filmmakers with the ability to keep looking, to not cut away at any point. Though the edits are perhaps merely masked by the use of CGI, the crucial impression the spectator gets is that an action is taking place unmediated on screen. A scene which may have taken several shots in the 1990s - the beating in *Irréversible* as a four shot sequence, for example (shot of man swinging fire extinguisher, shot of extinguisher from behind the victim's head, shot of extinguisher hitting the mock head for the gore effects, shot of the dead body on the floor) - can now look like a single shot.

Likewise, in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* remake, the shot of Andy hanging from the meat hook with half his leg missing and the other half a bloody stump is also made possible by advances in CGI. The combination of practical effects and computer generated prosthetics afford the audience a view of bloody limbs dangling from a living person with a heretofore unrealized sense of realism because the film shows us everything.

Linda Williams's theory of "body genres" provides a crucial way to conceptualize the assaultive trait of both the new extremism and the new horror film. A body genre is a group of films which feature as a key component "the spectacle of a body caught in the grip of intense sensation or emotion."[16] Williams also states that these spectacles are mirrored in the reaction of the spectator watching them. Writing in general about body genres - pornography, the horror film, the "weepie" or "woman's picture" - Williams states that "what seems to bracket these particular genres from others is an apparent lack of proper esthetic distance, a sense of over-involvement in sensation and emotion."[17]

Brigid Cherry concisely sums up Williams's position on the function of horror as a body genre rather concisely:

> Williams suggests that the aesthetic of fear in the horror films is designed to bring about intense sensations of fear, in other words to provoke affective experiences around depictions of violence. What is important here is the way the responses are contained within - and thus key features of - the narrative and stylistic components of the horror film.[18]

The new extremism is often written about similarly. This can be seen in Grønstad's discussion of "physicality," which frames these films as a body genre themselves. In *Brutal Intimacy,* Tim Palmer describes the main French corpus of the new extremism with the term "*cinema du corps* (cinema of the body)." In its evocation of the body's centrality to the films of the new extremism, the term

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[16] Linda Williams, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess," *Film Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (1991), 4.
[17] Ibid., 5.
[18] Cherry, *Horror* , 47.

mirrors Williams's theory. It also keeps us within the realm of affect, describing a relationship between the film and spectator that is similar to the term "body horror" in its foregrounding of a particular film's preoccupations.

The aesthetics of the new extremism and millennial horror go beyond the traditional definition of body horror, though. A hallmark of body horror is that the body is often destroyed from the inside out. Body horror is often preoccupied with merely the horror of the body itself. It tends to focus on manifestations of disease, decay and mutation. Examples of this type of horror can be found in the films of David Cronenberg (i.e. - *The Brood*, 1979; *Videodrome*, 1984; and *The Fly*, 1986), which often feature characters disgusted with their own changing bodies and whose deaths are usually brought about by their own body's monstrosity. The aesthetics of the films I am concerned with focus on the body as a site of external destruction and the repulsiveness of that assault.

When discussing abjection in these films, I am referring to the act of dismemberment as well as the bodies themselves, as well as how that creates an affection reaction in the viewer. This is a slight modification from its original psychoanalytic/feminist model as set forth by Julia Kristeva and utilized by Barbara Creed in her idea of the monstrous-feminine. Yet it is nonetheless similar: abjection is about exclusion, repulsion, and negation. The films of the new extremism and millennial horror both feature the abject as a theme, confronting the viewer with the unwatchable and forcing them to react to it.

It is important to understand millennial horror films and the new extremism as interrelated moments within the art cinema and the horror genre which are inextricably in conversation with each other. The deployment of a shared aesthetics to cause repulsion in their audiences is a significant development in both sets of films. But it is not limited to *just* these aesthetics at *this* time. The new extremism and millennial horror films share a generic lineage of shock and disgust. The use of gore and advanced special effects have accompanied the development of both the art film and the horror genre since the very birth of cinema, from Georges Melies to the Surrealists and beyond. They have operated in similar ways and toward similar ends throughout film history as well.

What makes the new extremism and millennial horror important is the specificity with which they play off one another. This specificity has to do with transgressions of traditional narrative development as well as the nature of their shared aesthetics. The former point is a relatively minor one compared to the aesthetic transgressions of millennial art and horror films, and will be discussed when pertinent throughout this thesis. For now, we will acknowledge the fact that narrative disruption can also cause discomfort in an audience by pushing the viewer outside of the generic parameters they may have been expecting similar to the explicit visual content of the films.

Explicit gore permeates the visual aesthetics of these new films, but is also directly related to the overarching history of affect in the horror film.

Psychologist Rachel Herz points out that this creates a different affect for viewers of horror:

> Early horror films dwelled primarily on eliciting fear, with minimal portrayal of graphic murder, torture, and gore. In *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960), you never directly see Norman Bates stab Marion Crane. But in horror films produced after 1975, for the first time gore was on equal or greater display as terror. . . . The limits on cinematic disgust seem to be bounded only by imagination. Nevertheless, there is something special about horror movie mutilation that has an appeal where non-horror gore does not. People will quickly turn off a slaughterhouse documentary that has the blood-and-guts content equivalent to a popular horror film.[19]

The assertion that horror audiences view these films differently is certainly true, noted by many scholars, including Stephen Prince in his extensive work on violence in classical films. Herz's articulation of this difference, however, is important because it draws not just on examinations of audience relationships to the films, but specifically to the psychology of the viewers and the reasons the horror film might appeal to them in the first place. Horror audiences can be linked to thrill seekers. Horror fans receive an adrenaline boost from watching horror films, and thus there is a pleasurable reaction to being repulsed.

British film critic Mark Kermode tells us that horror fans are essentially different from mainstream film viewers. He argues that horror is essentially a surrealist genre, and that non-fans consistently take the films' effects at face value. The horror fan understands the complexities of what they are watching

[19] Rachel Herz, *That's Disgusting : Unraveling the Mysteries of Repulsion* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2012), 135.

and is "compelled to 'read' rather than merely 'watch' such movies."[20] Kermode's claim reflects Herz's, and points to a difference between reality and artifice when watching scenes of violence. The horror fan, or even someone who merely enjoys watching horror films without engaging in specific aspects of fandom, at least in Kermode's definition, view the films as artificial constructions devoid of realism.

Kermode attributes this primarily to an appreciation of the special effects techniques employed in the film. A knowledge of various latex processes, blood bag/squib placement, and even the crude understanding of photographic processes and CGI combined with practical effects is imparted to the fan via the genre press, and this knowledge allows horror fans to function as a type of close-knit community. An example of this "insider" recognition used by Kermode is the cameo of people only fans would recognize - director David Cronenberg as a doctor in his own film, *The Fly*, make-up artist Tom Savini appearing randomly onscreen as "third person from the left," and so on. This also has to do with the lineage of the horror film, which, as we will discuss later, is essentially self-referential due to its lingering status as a "low" culture object and the need for fans to recognize a film's *bona fides*.

I am not sure, however, that the new horror films necessarily function on this level. I myself am a horror fan and though I do take pleasure in watching these millennial horrors, I cannot help but also become overwhelmed by them.

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[20] Mark Kermode, "I Was A Teenage Horror Fan," in *Ill Effects : The Media/Violence Debate*, ed. Martin Barker and Julian Petley (London: Routledge, 2001), 130.

And I am not alone. Many reviews from the genre press consistently use words like “brutal,” “disgusting,” and “sick” to describe their experience watching these films. These same sites and reviews will also rate the gore and special effects. In some cases, as with the French film *Á l’intérieur* (Alexandre Bustillo and Julien Maury, 2007), the reviewer is left dumb struck, unable to even give either a quantitative or qualitative rating. The experience seems to be different with these films in some way.

None of this means that horror fans are insensitive to the violence depicted in a horror film. This also does not necessarily mean that fans of the horror genre are completely re-sensitized to the blood and guts aspect of the genre. Instead, I believe that Kermode gets it right when he says that “the experienced horror fan understands the on-screen action in terms of a heritage of genre knowledge which absolutely precludes the possibility of sadistic titillation.”[21]

It is particularly interesting that Kermode differentiates the understanding a horror fan may have of violence while watching different types of films. His example of *The Evil Dead* (Sam Raimi, 1981) and *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* (John McNaughton, 1986) focuses on the difference between viewing comedic versus serious gore, and serves to illustrate how a horror fan can still be disgusted while recognizing the fan-oriented aspects of the horror film.

Scenes of blood and guts in these films are deployed to create a sense of disgust in the viewer, and depending on a certain degree of what an audience

[21] Ibid., 131.

expects, they succeed. And it may not necessarily be true that in order for our bodies to react affectively to the bodies on screen we must visibly be disgusted and find no pleasure in watching.

Herz relays a study conducted in Britain which found that viewers who watched the 1974 version of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* showed an increase in heart rate and blood pressure by about 20 percent, and that "blood samples taken from those who had watched the film showed markedly elevated levels of leukocytes, the white blood cells our body releases to fight off invading pathogens. . . . *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* set off the body's immune response when there were in fact no pathogens present."[22]

The emotion of disgust is experienced only by humans, likely as we are "the only creature that knows it will die."[23] Herz claims that "the lure of horror is the lure of the mystery of death. By watching horror movies, we get to experiment with the possibilities of death in fantasy form and in such extreme ways that we can comfort ourselves with thoughts that it couldn't possibly be worse than the grotesque, uncontrollable, unexpected, and brutal things that we see on the screen."[24]

If this is true, if we use horror in this way - if horror fans use horror in this way - then what does it mean to experience especially brutal death as in the millennial horror cycles. These films feature the dismemberment of bodies for no reason, sometimes instantly, and often under extreme duress. What interest

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[22] *That's Disgusting : Unraveling the Mysteries of Repulsion*, 133.
[23] Ibid., 127.
[24] Ibid., 147.

would the art film, a critical designation traditionally used to elevate the status of film culturally, have in examining bodies in this way? And why did all of this coalesce around the turn of the millennium?

In trying to answer these questions, this thesis will examine American and French horror films as they relate to the art films produced as part of the new extremism. I will show that these seemingly disparate sets of films actually share much more than seems evident at first look, not only by using similar imagery of blood, guts, and violent death, but also similar aesthetic means to cause revulsion in their audiences. The differences between the use of blood and guts in this group of horror films and those of the 1970s (and earlier) will be addressed throughout the thesis as we discuss the aesthetics of brutality associated with millennial horror films and the new extremism.

In addition to tracing some of the differences between horror films of the 1970s and the 2000s, I will also demonstrate that these new horror and art films affect a variety of audiences in similar ways. Though horror fans may have different expectations than fans of the European art cinema, these films overwhelm and brutalize all of them, from new fans to seasoned veterans of each sub-genre or cycle.

A secondary thread to keep in mind is the use of narrative and character as a means to disrupt the consensual expectations of these films as works of art and horror. Nearly all of the films under discussion betray the expectations of audiences through a variety of narrative devices. Primarily, as we will see, the

innocence of the protagonist does not result in their redemption and the defeat of evil as has been a traditional formula for the slasher film. And in the new extremism as well as the millennial horror film, the aesthetics of gore and brutality deployed stop the narrative dead in its tracks, refusing to allow the film to move away from the spectacle of the body broken down.

In Chapter 1, I examine the historical relationship between art and horror as pertains to three films released around 1960: *Eyes Without a Face* (Georges Franju, 1959), *Peeping Tom* (Michael Powell, 1960), and *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960). By looking at these films and their reception, we can begin to understand not only the origins of the modern horror film in both the United States and France, but also the source of the critical uneasiness with which the films of the new extremism have been approached. Precariously balanced between art and horror traditions, these films were all made by extremely well regarded filmmakers whose careers were changed by their new relationship with "low" culture. In line with that discussion, this chapter also looks at the ways in which the new extremism and the millennial horror film has been received within the discourse of scholarship on 21st Century French cinema.

Chapter 2 traces the origins of the new extremism and its appropriated imagery through various modes of representation and explicit gore in horror cinema. As a case study, I demonstrate a common lineage between Claire Denis's *Trouble Every Day* and a number of horror sub-genres (the mondo film, the cannibal film, post-millennial slashers and remakes, etc.). It is through a

shared history of explicit representation of the abject human body that we can begin to understand global image culture and how the art film's use of time and duration might play into other genres, which is the focus of Chapter 3.

The history of horrific images across genre boundaries is important to keep in mind as we compare millennial French and American horror cinemas. Chapter 3 examines the explicit gore and brutality of these films in context of industrial practice and reception, with an emphasis on its effect on critics and audiences. Through analysis of *The Devil's Rejects* (Rob Zombie, 2005) and *Haute Tension*, we can see that the appropriation of endurance from the art cinema, combined with advances in technology which make that endurance possible, renders the new horror film as a brutalizing force which causes discomfort in its audience much the same way the new extremism does for the audience of art cinema.

The French horror film *A L'intérieur* informs a discussion of the ways these films also function as political allegory in a world where the horrors signified in 1970s exploitation horror films have gone global. We will continue to examine the intersections between art and horror as laid out in previous chapters in light of 21st Century national and international politics. From new revelations and official acknowledgements in France of complicity in torture during the French-Algerian War and confirmation of active participation in the Holocaust during the German Occupation to the War on Terror, we can see this new extremism as one of many

instances of media in the new millennium trading in easily accessible documents, including explicit photographs and video of death and torture on the Internet.

This snapshot of the political allegory contained in these films is discussed briefly in the conclusion as a way of demonstrating the usefulness of examining the new extremism and millennial horror in conjunction with one another as well as with other media. By attempting to understand the hows and whys of this cycle of explicit brutality, gore and violence as it affects us, we can better interpret new fears and threats as they manifest themselves in mass culture.

Chapter One:
Art Films, Horror Cinema and the Shared Legacy of Repulsiveness

The aesthetics of the horror film share a long history with those of the art cinema. It is possible to make very general connections between specific artistic movements and horror since at least the 1920s. Surrealism is concerned with depicting the mind, constructing a visual language of dreams and nightmares that plays into the project of the horror film throughout the genre's history. A famous example can be found in the opening scenes of *Un Chien Andalou* (Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, 1929), when a woman's eye is slit with a razor blade and the viewer is subjected to a series of bizarre images which may or may not mean anything in conjunction with one another. Significantly, *Un Chien Andalou* is often cited as one of the origins of the modern horror film, which trades in not only dream logic and nightmare imagery, but also in an aesthetic assault on its audience.[25]

German Expressionism, with its emphasis on the outward expression of inner psychology via artistic technique, produced some of the earliest examples of the horror genre. *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1920) tells the story of a murdering somnambulist controlled by the eponymous doctor who is terrorizing the countryside during a fair. Its visual aesthetics, well-documented at

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[25] The influence of Buñuel and Dalí's film on the horror genre is often acknowledged in both popular and scholarly criticism. Take as an example the essay "A Parisian in Hollywood: Ocular Horror in the Films of Alexandre Aja," in which Tony Perrello refers to *Un Chien Andalou* as a "canonical film" of the genre (in *American Horror Film: The Genre at the Turn of the Millennium* ed. Steffen Hantke (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 25). And a 2004 article in *The Guardian* newspaper makes a lengthy case for the influence of surrealism broadly and *Andalou* in particular on the horror genre (Jonathan Jones, "The Joy of Gore," http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2004/feb/07/art1.)

this point in time, convey psychological terror and dread through the use of not only real light and shadow, but painted shadows on sets, with jagged lines characterizing the outward display of the main character's inner turmoil in the world of the film.

Both of these films demonstrate some of the ways in which art cinema may dabble in the language of horror. But it can also work the other way. A horror film from the same period may adopt the language of artistic movements. F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922) adapts Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula* using the aesthetics of Expressionism. Not only does this film feature shot composition and set design to those which made *Caligari* so famous two years prior, and rely on its cinematography to transform the world of the film into its protagonist's nightmare come to life, *Nosferatu* also has at its heart a vicious monster whose sole impulse and purpose is to take life.

We should take note here that all three of these films - *Caligari*, *Un Chien Andalou*, and *Nosferatu* - are made by filmmakers who are by and large considered true artists, auteurs of the cinematic form. The relationship between auteur theory and the horror and art films with which we are concerned will continually rear its head. This is mainly due to the fact that many definitions of the art film share as a major component the identification of the director as a marker of distinction and expectation. The new extremism in particular confronts its critics with a break from the norms associated with either specific directors or the specific national cinema mode within which their films are associated.

Auteurism was first enshrined in the art cinema, and though the horror genre is perhaps less reliant upon the name recognition of its filmmakers as far as a general audience is concerned, there are nonetheless acknowledged auteurs, including George A. Romero, John Carpenter, Wes Craven, and Eli Roth. This is useful to keep in mind inasmuch as it allows us to consider the expectations of the audience and the reception of films by the critic in light of a filmmaker's reputation. This is equally important in both art and horror.

Ozu Yasujirô, Jacques Tatí, Jean-Luc Godard, Claire Denis, et al may automatically draw fans of the international art cinema to watching a film. With them they would bring a certain amount of expectation of how the film they are about to watch will function aesthetically, thematically, and according to any other number of parameters for which the filmmaker is known. This is the same for horror audiences and fans. The audience depending on the film they are going to see can reasonably assume a certain number of things. Someone viewing a zombie film or a slasher has certain tropes and sets of aesthetics in mind when they decide to go and see the film.

Both the common lineage and co-mingling of aesthetics of art and horror cinemas and the tempering of audience expectations are key to building our understanding of the relationship between the two genres. Keeping this in mind, I wish to consider a trio of films made by highly regarded directors in a two year period which all received mixed critical receptions at the time of their release:

Georges Franju's *Eyes Without A Face*, Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom*, and Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*.

These three examples will serve to illustrate several key points in regard to the new extremism's adoption of the horror film's abject content. First, they demonstrate that the films of the new extremism and American and French horror share a common lineage, with each genre utilizing the films in different ways as a reference point in their cultural legacy. Second, they allow us to contextualize the way in which art cinema and horror films operate in a commercial system and consider how Art and Exploitation (horror) are artificial constructions which serve to signify specific meanings to particular audiences.

While this last point is true of all generic constructions, the discourse between art cinema and horror is often seen as being at extreme odds with one another. Fans of art films do not expect the art cinema to function within the parameters of the horror genre, or vice versa. The art film audience in particular has an investment in the divide between high and low cultural objects, and is perhaps less willing to tolerate the transgressions of explicit horror film imagery in its viewing experiences. This delineation of audience expectation is complicated, however, by the crossover of the horror genre into the art cinema not only in the surrealist and Expressionist films discussed above, but also in the three films to which we now turn, and again in the films of the new extremism.

Georges Franju's *Eyes Without A Face* is possibly the most transgressive of the early French horror films. The key scene of the film–a gruesome surgery in

which the victim's face is removed on-screen and the gore underneath is plainly exposed–is at least as shocking as the famous razor blade to the eye in Buñuel's *Un Chien Andalou*, if not more so due to the protracted length of the event. Adam Lowenstein carefully traces Franju's standing in the heated and politically charged climate of French criticism and filmmaking in the late-Fifties, concluding that he was "routinely marginalized" and "belonged to neither the New Wave nor the Left Bank."[26] Largely due to the disappointment with the presentation of gore in *Eyes Without A Face*, Franju lost his footing with these particular critical movements at the time.

The question of content is one that keeps coming up in reviews of these films, especially in the negative statements made about them by critics. When Lowenstein notes that *Eyes Without A Face* was not lauded by Jean-Luc Godard in *Cahiers du Cinéma*'s top ten list for 1959, just a year after Franju's debut feature *Head Against the Wall* (1959) received glowing praise, we can only surmise that what has changed between these films is the subject matter with which Franju is working.[27] Lowenstein demonstrates how the content of a film can negatively impact the reputation of the artist involved.[28] *Eyes Without a Face*

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[26] Adam Lowenstein, *Shocking Representation : Historical Trauma, National Cinema, and the Modern Horror Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 32-33.
[27] Ibid., 33
[28] Lowenstein also quotes an article in *Positif* from 1962 which describes Franju thus: "There's something very saddening in Franju's career, and his steadily widening distance from all the hopes we placed in him, his self-burial in conventional productions, in five-finger exercises of style, and in Selected Classics." (Ibid., 33) Whatever is meant by calling his films "five-finger exercises of style," it is certainly clear that Franju was out of touch with the political moment of French film criticism that dominated this period, as derogatorily pointed out with the term "Selected Classics," which alludes to the disdain for the Tradition of Quality films that Truffaut and the critics at *Cahiers du Cinéma* polemicized against repeatedly. Lowenstein discusses this

is now regarded as a key film of its time in the *fantastique*, a tradition of surrealist "horror" in France that includes the films of Meliés and Jean Cocteau's *Beauty and the Beast* (1946). Franju's film and Henri Georges Clouzot's *Diabolique* (1955) are now also held in a certain regard by horror fans.

In a very similar way, Michael Powell was disowned by the British press after he released *Peeping Tom*, an early template for the slasher film and a prime example of how psychoanalytic theory is played out in the horror genre. Examining a particularly scathing review of the film by Isabel Quigly, a critic for the weekly magazine *The Spectator*, Adam Lowenstein makes a connection between the film's "direct emotional realism" and its status for Quigly as "the sickest and filthiest" film in memory.[29] That this assertion comes just two weeks after she dismissed *Eyes Without a* Face in similar terms is not lost on Quigly, who goes on to say "there were worse visual horrors in [*Eyes*...] – but it didn't involve you, it made little attempt at direct emotional realism."[30] Here she identifies an important difference between Franju's and Powell's films: the involvement of the viewer in the violence of the film itself. While the argument could be made (and I think it is fairly obvious) that the expectations of the audience are transgressed in both cases, what makes *Peeping Tom* significant is that the generic parameters are broken by a form of direct address. The audience is implicated in the killings on screen because of the psychology of the film's

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dismissal of classical tradition, and contemporaneous non-New Wave films as reflective of the reactionary politics of the post-Occupation purge, particularly in Truffaut's language and rhetoric.

[29] Quoted in Ibid., 56.

[30] Ibid., 56.

murderer. Mark Lewis has a compulsion to watch his victims die over and over again on film, analogous to the film-spectator relationship of the horror genre, addressing the viewer directly and accusing them of being guilty of the same psychosis of the film's killer. That he is diagnosed with a psychological problem by the film's discourse on scopophilia and bearing witness to one's own fears is disturbing to critics like Quigly and can reasonably be extended to the reaction of the general audience expectation of a Michael Powell film up to this time.

Mark Lewis may not be a fully sympathetic character, but we can and do identify with him at certain times throughout the film. When he shows Helen a film of his father studying his reaction to fear as a young child, we sympathize with the tortures he endured when young, being forced to watch himself - his own terror looking back at him as his father films him - just as he forces the women he kills to bear witness to their own deaths. By aligning the audience with Mark in this way, and then forcing us to watch the close-ups of the murders just as the victims (as he once did) watch themselves, the film troubles the identification of the spectator. It holds up a mirror to our own dark impulse to see torture and death on screen, and places us both in the role of perpetrator (Mark/his father) and victim (Mark/the women) simultaneously.

Powell, a respected co-director of films like *Black Narcissus* (1947), *The Red Shoes* (1948), and *The Tales of Hoffman* (1951), all with Emerich Pressburger, violated audience expectation by appropriating exploitation into his repertoire and provoking his critics–a notable prefiguring of how the new

extremism provoked James Quandt some forty years later. And yet *Peeping Tom* was relatively well-received by some critics in France and was adopted as an anti-French New Wave text.[31] Journals such as *Positif*, with an interest in Surrealism and the British horror cinema more generally, saw the film in the tradition of the Hammer horrors released at the end of the 1950s. Leila Wimmer notes that the Hammer films, with their emphasis on eroticism, violence, and gore were viewed as the successors of the theatrical *Grand Guignol* tradition. As such, the British horror cinema came to be seen, at least by its proponents, as inextricably tied to these three characteristics, and was of interest in France, where a strong horror genre had never coalesced.[32]

Carol Clover's account of *Peeping Tom*'s reception also takes into consideration Michael Powell's insistence that his film is "not a horror film,"[33] anticipating the claims of Claire Denis that *Trouble Every Day* is not a film about gore. And yet, Clover still notes that "the early critics were not entirely wrong to spot a connection between *Peeping Tom* and the Hammer productions of the period. . . insofar as *Peeping Tom* is the theory of a cinematic undertaking of

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[31] In a review of the film published in *Positif* (no. 36, 1960) Jean-Paul Török writes: "But the purpose of *Peeping Tom* goes beyond these subtle games. It can be seen as a delicately nuanced psychological study of an authentic film auteur, who pushes a particular conception of the direction of actors to its limits. For voyeurism alone is not enough to explain the character of [Mark] Lewis: he is also, and at one and the same time, a sadistic film-maker and murderer, with these different facets forming a coherent whole. A quite serious psychoanalytical explanation is adduced for this collection of morbidities, which will come as no surprise to those who know that in the look fixedly directed at someone, there lies an unconscious wish to cause suffering, and even to kill." (Jean-Paul Török, "Look at the Sea: Peeping Tom," http://www.powell-pressburger.org/Reviews/60_PT/PT16.html.)

[32] Leila Wimmer, *Cross-Channel Perspectives : The French Reception of British Cinema* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 171.

[33] Carol J. Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws : Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 169.

which the Hammer productions and *Psycho* are a practice, it necessarily plays in the register of horror."[34] It is important to note here that Clover points to *Psycho* as having a direct lineage within the horror genre itself, something which in her account *Peeping Tom* does not. Powell's film, that is, operates just outside the bounds of the genre, while *Psycho* fits firmly within its parameters.

Released in the United States on June 16, 1960, just two months after *Peeping Tom*'s premiere in London, Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* utilized similar elements taken from the horror genre to tell the story of a mild-mannered hotel owner who murders a young woman he is sexually attracted to, as well as others who might find him out. Hitchcock avoided much of the critical backlash that accompanied the release of *Peeping Tom* and *Eyes Without a Face* for a few reasons, not the least of which was his star persona. By 1960, he had made weekly appearances in the homes of many Americans thanks to the television program *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* (1955-1962), and was slowly growing in reputation as an *auteur* (a reputation certainly indebted to French film culture, and the *Cahiers* critics in particular). David Thomson notes the relationship between his persona as the host of the TV series and the marketing of *Psycho*, specifically the theatrical trailer in which he "starred":

> Hitchcock was by then known for the poker-faced intros to his television show. So he employed the same method on a rather grander scale for his new movie. Now he was a kind of realtor showing off the Bates Motel for prospective buyers. So he was dry and dusty, and then struck by how much it had all been tidied up since–since the blood, and then for an instant you were into the shower mayhem and that crude but very effective dare

[34] Ibid., 169.

> that still gets people to the movies: "Can you stand to see this?"[35]

While the marketing of the film took advantage of Hitchcock's popular celebrity persona, the film was also released without an advance press screening, thus bypassing some of the issues which had dogged Powell, namely the negative press. It was also released in quick fashion, with featured releases in New York and L.A., and followed by the widest release possible shortly thereafter.[36] Thomson again notes that "the reviews never mattered because of the fantastic launch the film had received. The suggestion of an uncommon flirtation with violence in a front-rank film worked."[37] Aside from whether or not the reviews mattered, it is worth pointing out that they never reached the same level of disgust as Quigly's review of *Peeping Tom*.[38]

As a cultural bellwether *Psycho* is unmatched, a strong indication of many things to come in American cinema after the disintegration of the Hays Office and the Production Code in the mid 1960s. It also indicated that the audience itself, much like in *Peeping Tom*, was implicated in the action of the film's killer. According to David Thomson, "the title [*Psycho*] warned that the central character was a bit of a nut, but the deeper lesson was that the audience in its self-inflicted experiment with danger might be crazy, too."[39] This assessment of the relationship between the audience and the film indicates that Hitchcock was also

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[35] David Thomson, *The Moment of Psycho : How Alfred Hitchcock Taught America to Love Murder* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 95.
[36] Ibid., 94.
[37] Ibid., 96.
[38] Thomson also gives a run-down of the range of reviews of the film in his book, Ibid., 98-99.
[39] Ibid., 3.

engaged in the “direct emotional realism” of *Peeping Tom* that might affect the audience’s reception of his horror film, a furthering of his well-documented obsession with winding an audience up.

If Quigly’s objection to *Peeping Tom*’s violence was couched in terms of her own complicity in Mark’s murders, evoking and making her aware of her own desire to see people murdered on screen, then Hitchcock furthers this by aligning the audience of *Psycho* with Norman Bates in a variety of ways. First, though he cleans up after his mother’s murder, we do not know he has in fact committed the crime upon first viewing. Second, after Marion Crane’s body is disposed of in the swamp, he is the only character the viewer is acquainted with in any personal way, thanks to several preceding scenes which establish him as the other lead.

Though he seems odd while talking and eating dinner with Marion, and even though he is devoted to his mother enough to clean up the blood and dispose of the body after the gruesome killing, and even though he might be a bit of a creep himself (he was just watching Marion undress for her shower after all), we are left with only him. After Marion Crane’s murder, Norman Bates becomes the de facto lead of the film we thought we were watching but which has since morphed into something more sinister. By the time of the great revelation that Norman has been dressing as his mother and killing people all along, we have spent so much time with this character, and have furthermore become complicit in following his crimes, that we are implicated in his violence.

For numerous reasons then, Hitchcock managed to release a picture, quite successfully, that featured as its centerpiece a scene which could conceivably be considered the most violent of any film up to that time. And some of this can be traced to the audience's expectation of the genre within which Hitchcock was working, something which was an unknown in the case of Franju and Powell's films, partly due to the fact that neither director was known for working within the framework of the thriller or murder mystery. In contrast, the audience of a Hitchcock picture had long been accustomed to the prominence of murder in his plots. Whether or not the graphic nature of the violence in *Psycho*'s murders was expected is somewhat beside the point. Audiences left the theater shocked but wanting more, and were appeased with a long line of knock-offs and imitations throughout the 1960s to satiate their lust for shocking violence.[40] Hitchcock was able to deflect the unprecedented explicit nature of violence in his film with the same cockney-accented affectation which allowed him to murder someone every week on American television and remain a successful and respected filmmaker, while both Franju and Powell fell out of favor.

What these three cases indicate is that the critical and cultural contexts within which they were received continue to be felt today. The films of the new extremism and the gory American and French horror films of the 2000s were and still are criticized heavily for their transgressive content and assaults on their audiences. As we shall see, the art cinema and the horror cinema still retain much of the same generic expectations as they did in 1960 thanks largely to

[40] James Kendrick, *Film Violence : History, Ideology, Genre* (London: Wallflower, 2009), 56.

critical and academic discourse. The implication of audience complicity and desire in a film's violent acts is a thread which runs through discussions of the horror genre and the art cinema from 1960 onward.

The relationship between art cinema and the horror genre is one of contention and unease. In discussing the dichotomy between art cinema and exploitation (and specifically Ingmar Bergman's *The Virgin Spring*, 1960, and Wes Craven's *Last House on the Left*, 1972), the latter a generic category intimately related to modern American and French horror, Robin Wood writes, "I use the terms Art and Exploitation here not evaluatively but to indicate two sets of signifiers–operating both within the films as 'style' and outside them as publicity, distribution, etc.–that define the audience-film relationship in general terms."[41] It is toward these two sets of signifiers, questions of style and publicity/distribution specifically, which we now turn in the discussion of the art cinema and the horror genre in France.

The similarities of not only visual and aural content - the gore and brutality - but also of tone and plotting between the French art cinema and the American and French horror films of the 2000s are worth considering at this point. If we can see that the aesthetic presentation of brutality is the same in both sets of films, what does that mean? Are the horror films aspiring to be considered high art? Or can we say that they are simply a popularized form of the *cinéma du corps*, an

[41] Robin Wood. "Neglected Nightmares," in *The Horror Film Reader*, ed. Alain Silver and James Ursini (New York: Limelight Editions, 2000), 114.

answer to the seemingly pretentious nature with which the new extremism presents its adopted generic qualities, whether gory or pornographic?

In a discussion of Robin Campillo's *Les Revenants (They Came Back*, 2004), a drama with digressions into the zombie movie formula, which is part of what Palmer calls the pop-art cinema, Palmer writes that the film's "images are far from unusual among today's French filmmakers. . . And it is horror cinema–vulgar, graphic, shamelessly derivative yet undeniably potent–that has propelled...young French filmmakers to Hollywood,"[42] particularly Alexandre Aja, who was hired to direct the remake of *The Hills Have Eyes* based on his success with *Haute Tension*. With this final statement about young French directors finding work in Hollywood, Palmer points to the exact relationship between art and horror films I believe is essential to our understanding of generic intermingling as concerns image content. Building on his conceptualization of the way the French industry works, I wish to make a case for how horror itself has a central role in how we might conceptualize the popular cinema in France in the 2000s. The centrality of popular films to French cinema at this time, particularly in international release, is something which Palmer dismisses nearly outright in his discussion of the country's film industry.

This relationship is as follows: as American horror reorients its aesthetics from a torrential cycle of remakes of supernatural Japanese horror films and self-reflexive (and often bloodless) teen-oriented PG-13 craze of the late 1990s and

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[42]Tim Palmer, *Brutal Intimacy: Analyzing Contemporary French Cinema* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2011), 133-144

early 2000s and begins re-imagining and re-making its most violent and potent cycles (the slasher/meat movie and the gore/mondo film of the late-70s and 80s) as a bloodier, more nihilistic cinema, French horror directors begin to crop up with their own violent takes on the popular forms of millennial American horror: 70s revisionism and the new "torture porn" cycle. These directors and their films (Alexandre Aja/*Haute Tension*; Pascal Laugier/*Martyrs*, 2008; and Xavier Gens/*Frontiere(s)*, 2007) were well-received by the international genre press and their financial success in the U.S. market helped them to land jobs in Hollywood beginning in the middle of the decade.

At the same time that the Hollywood product was becoming gorier and much more explicit, the films of the new extremism in Europe more broadly were adopting the abject content of the horror film and legitimizing it through their acceptance as an outgrowth of French and various international art cinemas, most of which have long-established auteurs with histories of generic appropriation of their own. By the time the bulk of the new French horror films were in release in the U.S. (2005-2010), there was already a surfeit of extreme content produced by French filmmakers and released internationally. The use of horror aesthetics in the French art cinema along with the popularity and profitability of the American cycles both in the United States and Europe provided an environment within which the horror genre could gain a legitimate foothold as part of France's national film industry.

We should note briefly here that a further connection between the French horror genre and the new extremism is the use of actors. Phillipe Nahon is cast by Aja as the killer in *Haute Tension* based on the notoriety of his performance as the unhinged butcher in Gaspar Noé's *I Stand Alone*. Likewise, Alexandre Bustillo and Julien Maury selected Béatrice Dalle as much because of her particular star persona - outlandish, wild, and with the nickname "La Grande Bouche (the big mouth)" - as her cannibalistic turn in *Trouble Every Day*. This is a relatively minor instance of overlap, but it does illustrate some of the direct influence the new extremism had on some filmmakers interested in making films within the horror genre.

Tim Palmer states that the new extremism was influenced at least partially by "a closely related tendency in contemporary French-language literature"[43] which shares an interest in explicit representations of the human body similar to those discussed more in-depth with *Trouble Every Day* in the following chapter. Even though this falls just outside the bounds of our discussion, I bring it up to illustrate yet another instance in which such content is legitimated through its use in artistic culture, and thus can be transferred into areas which are typically thought of as having lower cultural worth. The French horror film's emergence during this period was possible because of conditions within the film industry that led to its economic viability as much as the cultural acceptance in afforded

[43] Ibid., 63

extreme content by the success of American horror in France and by the use of brutal gore and sexual violence in French literature and certain major art films.[44]

The new extremism's close connection with the horror film is best exemplified by examining the imagery shared and exchanged between them. While Palmer does make a brief connection here, noting that *Baise-Moi* (Virginie Despentes and Coralie, 2000) "revived the 1970s rape-revenge format from the female point of view," he nonetheless insists on seeing the films within the mode of what he calls the "explicit sexual dramas" of Bernardo Bertolucci, John Cameron Mitchell, Michael Winterbottom, and Lars von Trier, whose *Antichrist* (2009) is as much a gothic horror and gore film as it is anything else.[45]

Palmer is totally disinterested in the horror film in his book, and seems to exhibit a bias in favor of art films throughout. This is exemplified in his discussion of "pop-art" cinema (what he considers the popular cinema of France), which he attributes to films by respectable directors whose work has been well-received both critically and commercially. Egregiously, once he does finally discuss France's popular cinema, the new extremism and its generic appropriation, Palmer all but ignores the significant horror productions which were made since *Haute Tension* gained international recognition in 2005.

In a single paragraph in this chapter, he gives significant horror texts - not just for France but for international horror - a glossing over, listing their names

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[44] French horror films were very profitable both in France and internationally, with several of the key films under discussion making as much as their American counterparts (and outperforming most of the art films) at the box office. For a more in-depth discussion of box office and distribution of American and French horror in both the United States and France, see Chapter 3.
[45] Ibid., 64

and the type of horror film they are (vampire, cannibal, etc.) and not much else. There is no analysis, barely any context, and only a scant mention that the films "mimic Hollywood subgenres."[46] And while it is brought up that these films achieved financial success as exported products, and proved lucrative for their directors' careers, Palmer immediately returns to a discussion of "pop-art" films. Horror is, as ever, stuck in its box, only discussed in order to provide context for other films, and then hidden away again before it taints anything worthy of actual consideration.

Alternatively, Ben McCann provides a model of French cinema within which the horror film specifically was allowed to flourish. His essay "Pierced Borders, Punctured Bodies" argues that "the emergence of the horror film in post-2000 French cinema represents both a continuity and a discontinuity with existing cinematic trends" such as that of the *fantastique* and the *cinéma du corps*."[47] The rupture between the new horror films and their lineage is, for McCann, that French horror "has manoeuvered itself into a position to overtake comedy as the genre best equipped to challenge consensual versions of recent French debates" over national political issues.[48] The idea of discontinuity between French horror and its lineage in the art cinema presents us with the opposite problem from Palmer's representation of horror as McCann occludes horror and sections it off

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[46] Ibid., 133
[47] Ben McCann, "Pierced Borders, Punctured Bodies: The Contemporary French Horror Film," *Australian Journal of French Studies* 45, no. 3 (2008), 226. The political debates McCann is referring to seem to be the issue of the integrity of the French national identity in the face of a surging immigrant population, especially in light of the post-9/11 anxieties surrounding what McCann calls "the consensual frameworks of contemporary French culture."
[48] Ibid., 226.

as doing something essentially different from the films of the *fantastique* and the new extremism, a point to which we will return shortly.

McCann also distinguishes between certain contemporary French horror films (*Á l'intérieur* and *Frontiere(s)*) and others (*Haute Tension*), as well as the American horror cinema, saying that the films in the former category "resist many of the postmodern inflections typical of global horror cinema."[49] This becomes problematic, however, when considering that *Haute Tension* is also unrelenting in its narrative and tonal disruption and brutality, ultimately taking the viewer to the same end: the film is too much to bear.

The problems of considering a certain group of films separately from another group which seems to be doing the same thing will become more evident as we dig further into the relationships between all of these films. For now, let us consider McCann's presentation of this horror cinema as an outgrowth of the legacy of the horror genre's minimal presence in France, and as something distinctly French in its presentation of subject. "In their tonal and narrative components," he writes, these films graft "metaphors of border porosity and domestic invasion onto their narratives of visual excess."[50] But this observation also points to a larger continuity within the tradition of horror more broadly, in which the horror film is representative of a disruption of normative behaviors and cultural acceptability. And it's not distinctly French.

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[49] Ibid., 226.
[50] Ibid., 226.

The image culture within which these films are made and circulate is not so easily confined, and by separating the genre unto itself in French cinema, McCann severely undermines his ability to consider the implications of his readings across international borders and in the broader scope of mass media. And while he acknowledges the aesthetic similarities between the *cinéma du corps*, the American "torture porn" cycle, and the explicit visual content of the modern French horror film, particularly their repeated interruption of narrative convention for drawn-out scenes of brutal violence, his reading of the films' political allegories are limited to the scope of French national politics. Specifically, the allegories in these films are seen as referential to the riots in the Paris suburbs in 2005, which were themselves indicative of and related to broader cultural events in the wake of the World Trade Center attacks on September 11, 2001, and the international politics surrounding the American-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In a very real sense, the approach McCann takes in his presentation of French horror as distinct from American horror undermines the potency of his allegorical reading. Morever, his removal of horror from the manifestations of brutality and abjection presented in the new extremism serves to lessen the impact of that content in some way. For if the new extremism "does not reproduce tropes of horror in the traditional sense," and its agenda is to "interrogate issues such as sexual violence, female emancipation, and the crisis

of masculinity,"[51] then for what purpose does it appropriate the tropes of horror that are inherently different from interrogations of the very same subjects in horror films?

The exclusivity with which Palmer and McCann discuss the horror genre and the new extremism recalls the fierce reactions caused by *Eyes Without a Face*, *Peeping Tom* and *Psycho*. If there is a further legacy within the development of both the art cinema and the horror film which these films share, it is perhaps their contributions to ongoing debates over art and exploitation; of low culture versus high culture. While those three films have been acknowledged as serious works of cinematic art in the decades since their release, the arguments for and against new horror films and the films of the new extremism seem less likely to reach a critical consensus.

This is due to the fact that critics like Palmer and McCann assess the legacy of the horror genre in the films of the new extremism as virtually nonexistent. They each take a stance within a scholarly framework which champions one type of film, at least in the books and essays cited, over another. In effect, one type of film is less worthy of consideration than the other. Yet what this further illustrates is that, because the films of both the new extremism and millennial horror can be discussed in the exact same manner, as doing the same exact thing, they should be thought about and discussed as interrelated movements within their respective genres, just as time has accorded to the legacies of Franju, Powell and Hitchcock. In fact, each of these new cycles must

[51] Ibid., 228.

be discussed and understood in conjunction with the other in order for a broader understandingof their mutual use of abject visual content and brutalizing aesthetics to emerge.

In the next chapter I will demonstrate that the films of the new extremism are very much in the same lineage of abjection we find in the horror and exploitation film. Using Claire Denis's *Trouble Every Day* as a case study, I will show that these films can not only be seen as, but have in some cases also been received as horror films despite the attempt at keeping them separated. This adoption of art cinema by the horror genre also echoes the histories of *Eyes Without a Face*, *Peeping Tom*, and *Psycho*, all of which were taken up as key texts in the history of the horror film even before they were recognized as works of art by critics and audiences. Furthermore, if these three films are seen by fans of the genre as operating within the parameters of the horror film while simultaneously their reputations as works of art have grown over time, we can then better understand how French and American horror have been appropriating the aesthetics of the art cinema at the turn of the new millennium, which we will explore in Chapter 3.

Chapter Two:
The Legacy of Horror in the New Extremism

As noted in the introduction, James Quandt wrote about a tendency in contemporary French art cinema that he noticed in a 2004 article published in *Artforum*. "The new extremity" as he called it, consisted of a disparate set of films by a diverse group of filmmakers, including art house auteurs Catherine Breillat, Gaspar Noé, and Claire Denis. Quandt wrote that for these films, "Bava as much as Bataille, Sálo no less than Sade seem the determinants of a cinema suddenly determined to break every taboo, to wade in rivers of viscera and spumes of sperm, to fill each frame with flesh, nubile or gnarled, and subject it to all manner of penetration, mutilation and defilement."[52]

Wondering why such talented filmmakers, especially of French art cinema, would adopt such transgressive modes of representation, Quandt seems particularly affected by the lack of a creative project or artistic impulse at work in the films themselves. He in fact dismisses them as largely meaningless exercises in repulsiveness, going on further to say that even "at their most immoderate (Franju, Buñuel, Waleria Borowczyk, Andrezej Zulawski)," the high art of France's national cinema has been "at least assimilable as emanations of an artistic movement (Surrealism mostly)."[53] What I find most interesting about Quandt's assessment of these films is that he disconnects them from the lineage of Surrealism, almost as if the provocations of their "rivers of viscera and spumes of

[52] James Quandt, "Flesh and Blood: Sex and Violence in Recent French Cinema," in *The New Extremism in Cinema: From France to Europe*, 19.
[53] Ibid., 19.

sperm" are in some way totally different from the horrors contained in *Eyes Without a Face* or *Un Chien Andalou*. The division of films by worth outlined by Quandt bumps right up against the same problems we saw in the discussion of French horror films by Tim Palmer and Ben McCann in the previous chapter.

The differentiation between modes of representation within art cinema itself into high and low cultural boundaries is reminiscent of the way *Eyes...*, *Peeping Tom*, and *Psycho* were received in 1960. These new films have upset the expectation of what should appear in the films of the French art cinema in much the same way the three earlier films represented a disruption in the legacies of their filmmakers. That Quandt and other critics identify the new extremism with auteurs in the art cinema is not coincidental, and furthers the link between their reception and that of Franju, Powell and Hitchcock.

Tanya Horeck and Tina Kendall sum up the backhandedness with which Quandt deploys the legacy of France's art cinema. "For critics such as...Quandt, these films display a nostalgia for the 'authentic' provocations of Buñuel, Fassbinder or Pasolini, but are not able to reconnect in any meaningful way."[54] The project of many of the essays included in the anthology, Horeck and Kendall's introduction included, is to recuperate the status of these films within the framework of the French and international art cinema. In effect, the films of the new extremism are to their mind best understood within the legacy of the French New Wave and the films of the Left Bank filmmakers, and thus worthwhile objects of discussion and study.

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[54] Tanya Horeck and Kendall, Tina, "Introduction," in Ibid., 6.

But one thing this discussion of the new extremism as art cinema consistently ignores is the way in which these films are also in direct conversation with developing extremist tendencies throughout the history of the modern horror film, particularly as applied in context of increased brutality and gore. It also ignores the two types of films from which the films and directors targeted in Quandt's missive seem to have drawn the most formal and generic inspiration: pornography and the gore film.

To explore the issues taken up by the new extremism and its multifaceted historical and theoretical context, I will examine Claire Denis's *Trouble Every Day* and delineate the ways in which its brand of new extremism is in conversation with current international horror cinema as well as with the status of the international art film. I will also examine the ways in which the film thwarts the academic and critical descriptions and expectations of its relationship to art cinema and forcefully employs graphic gore and brutality to achieve its impact.

The scenes of sexual violence within *Trouble Every Day* are exploited for shock value and linger on the carnage and brutality of the attacks. Whatever the artistic purpose of gore and brutality may be said to be, it is just as much a part of the development of explicit violence and gore within popular horror films since the 1960s as any trends within international art cinemas of the same period. I will now trace these developments in horror cinema as they relate to the new extremism and demonstrate how the explicit use of gore can not be overlooked when discussing these films.

The gore film, also commonly referred to as the splatter film, in which the human body is typically rendered as abject in form and as filmed subject, is the mode of horror film within which we might understand the transgressive nature of *Trouble Every Day*'s–and thus the new extremism's–violent content. A genre which takes as its primary concern the evisceration of both humans and animals as entertainment for self-described gore-hounds, the gore film also happens to span a large period of film history and has appeared in various forms within many national cinemas. While the film may be received by many different types of audiences, the gore-hound has as his or her sole interest in the film the "money shot" of the special effect - a reference to the vicarious thrills of gore associated with the same physical sensation of arousal as when viewing a pornographic film - and the realistic or unrealistic (and often therefore ironic) use of the deployment of explicit gore.

There is not a set of specific characteristics for describing a gore film other than an overt interest in the display of the human body's mutilation. In this way, many different sub-genres of horror might be considered gore films as well as any number of more traditional ways of defining them: the slasher or meat movie, the zombie film, the mondo film, and even the rape revenge film. The term "splatter cinema," used interchangeably with "gore film" or "meat movie," was coined by George A. Romero in reference to his film *Dawn of the Dead* (1974), but has also been used to describe the films of schlock director Herschell Gordon Lewis and extends into the explicit depictions of death and mutilation in the more

modern “torture porn” films. A few sub-genres of the horror film, each concerned with gore and explicit, realistic death, have a particular resonance in the films of the new extremism. This is at odds with the common assumption that the new extremism is best understood or examined in the context of international art cinemas.

The slasher sub-genre has been written about at great length, but I find it to be of continued relevance because it is often the primary source for all re-workings of the horror film, both within film criticism and industry practices. In the 2000s in the United States it underwent a particularly brutal transformation. Re-makes of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Dawn of the Dead* (Zack Snyder, 2004), Rob Zombie’s *Halloween* (2007) and *Halloween II* (2009), and *Friday the 13th* (Marcus Nispel, 2009) feature realistic gore and an increase in body count over the original films. New films also appeared throughout the decade that adopted the gritty realism aesthetics of 1970s exploitation horror: *The Devil’s Rejects* (Rob Zombie, 2005) and the double-feature *Grindhouse* (Quentin Tarantino and Robert Rodriguez, 2007), just to name a couple.

The slasher/meat movie genre also expanded within the U.S. at this time to include the first of the “torture porn” cycle: Eli Roth’s *Hostel* (2003) and *Hostel: Part II* (2007), the *Saw* series (James Wan, et. al, 2004-2010), *The Human Centipede* (Tom Six, 2009) and *The Human Centipede II* (Six, 2011), and *Captivity* (Roland Joffé, 2007). This version of the gore film has always been in conversation with international cinemas, from the Italian *gialli* of Mario Bava and

Dario Argento (who co-wrote and co-produced the original *Dawn of the Dead*), as well as Lucio Fulci, whose incoherent, non-linear narratives serve only the purpose of getting to "the money shot." The American slasher and "torture porn" cycle–the words "torture porn" themselves used as a pejorative term to further link the low forms of horror and pornography as two worthless endeavors–also engage similarly with the early films of Canadian director David Cronenberg which explore the abject body as diseased mutation, in which becoming something "Other" than oneself is central to the uncontrollable and often gory transformations of the human body. This also applies to the resurgence of French horror films which began appearing at the same time as many of the art films mentioned in Quandt's essay, but are not considered to be a part of the new extremism: *Ils* (David Moreau and Xavier Palud, 2006), *Haute Tension* (2003), *Frontiere(s)*, *À L'intérieur*, and *Martyrs*.

The brutality of the remakes of these slasher films, along with the newer cycles of the "torture porn" films and French horror, is key to understanding the shift in tone the murder scenes in the new extremism have adopted. These new films and cycles set out to horrify and terrorize as much as to shock and disgust the audience. In Rob Zombie's *Halloween II*, which is part remake and part original sequel to a remake, the increased splatter and viscera of the film's mise-en-scene is accompanied as well by a soundtrack designed with brutality in mind. When Michael Myers kills in this new iteration of John Carpenter's genre-defining film, each push of the knife and blow to the body of his victim sounds like a Mack

truck hitting a brick wall, very loudly. This is to say nothing of the wet sucking noises which accompany the knife's plunging into and out of the body, or the copious amounts of blood which pour out of his victims.

Marcus Nispel's remake of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* shows the audience the results of a chainsaw wound to one of the victim's legs in detail. The scene is completed with the modern Leatherface hanging the victim on one of the famous meathooks of the original film and then rubbing salt into the victim's amputation wound, effectively curing it for consumption by his cannibalistic family at some later time. Like the *Halloween* remake, *Texas Chainsaw* explicitly shows us what was merely implied in the original. Furthermore, as we have discussed previously, the soundtrack of *Chainsaw* is mixed very loud, emphasizing the endurance of brutality for the audience as well as the victim on screen. Zombie's *Halloween II* and Nispel's remake are not isolated incidents in their use of the soundtrack in this way.

The French horror films of the 2000s also share a commonality of nihilism and brutal violence. *Haute Tension* follows college friends Marie and Alexia as they evade a killer who breaks into Alexia's home in the countryside and murders her family. In one scene, the killer decapitates the father after shoving his head into the handrail of the staircase and ramming a piece of furniture from the foyer into him, after which a river of blood gushes from the neck and pools in the floor. The killer in *À L'intérieur* makes her initial attack while her victim sleeps, opening up a large pair of scissors and pushing them into the woman's pregnant belly

button. The sound of the scissors puncturing flesh in this scene is once again as important as the blood which pours out of the wound when the victim awakes and fends off her attacker. Each of these films contains a strain of nihilism: *Haute Tension*'s killer revealed to be Alexia's friend Marie, a betrayal of the only bond the audience could identify throughout the film as meaningful after the deaths of Alexia's family members. *À L'intérieur*'s final image is of the killer triumphant, a trail of blood and guts leading from the eviscerated corpse of her victim on the staircase to the killer sitting in the den holding the baby she has just cut out of the pregnant woman. This ending, like *Haute Tension*'s, also significantly subverts the ability of the audience to leave the film with a meaningful relationship with the protagonist. Evil wins, and the innocent are eviscerated. This motif appears again and again in the French horror films of this period.

This increased brutality and use of explicit gore as an evolving method of shocking and disgusting a film's audience is present in the films of the new extremism as well. *Trouble Every Day*'s centerpiece features not only the copious amounts of blood and viscera as these films, but also shares the disturbing audio mix in which the sounds of the attack are rendered cacophonous and nauseating.

The growth of the modern horror film into a genre concerned with gore and brutality partly shows the influence of the mondo film. A form of documentary, the mondo film began as an exploration of taboo subjects such as death, sex, and exotic foreign cultures. The mondo film is generally considered a form of exploitation cinema, and as sexual culture became more acceptable in the

1970s, the films began exploiting real footage of the violent deaths of animals and human beings, sometimes inserting fake footage and staged scenes of extremely gruesome death, including acts of cannibalism. Sample titles of the gore-centric films in this sub-genre include *Cannibal Holocaust* (Ruggero Deodato, 1980) and the *Faces of Death* series (John Alan Schwartz, et al., 1978-1990) and its many imitators.

The mix of documentary footage and fictional scenarios within many of these mondo films creates an atmosphere of uncertainty in which the viewer is unsure of what is real or fake, and in the case of *Cannibal Holocaust*, actually saw its creator arrested because authorities thought he had actually killed an actor to make the film. There is an important link between a film like *Cannibal Holocaust* and the art cinema as well, in that we can see clearly the need to separate "art" from exploitation, even if the aesthetics of representation–of realistic gore in this case–are similar. In an overview of the film and its controversial history, Andrew DeVos writes:

> Deodato's [the director of *Cannibal Holocaust*] error lies not in his use of exploitive plot devices to engage in cultural discourse, for we see that "serious" authors, artists and auteurs have been doing so for millenia; it was Deodato's choice to push these devices to such a fever pitch, to package a complex discourse in the guise of a full-scale sleaze-fest that ultimately alienated and offended so many.[55]

In DeVos's account of Deodato's transgression against taste it is possible to see how a critic like Quandt might take offense to that re-appropriation by a

[55] Andrew DeVos, "The More You Rape Their Senses, The Happier They Are: A History of *Cannibal Holocaust*" in *Cinema Inferno : Celluloid Explosions from the Cultural Margins*, ed. Robert G. Weiner and John Cline (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 93.

group of highly regarded art cinema directors. If the films of the new extremism are in some way re-appropriating the narrative structures and sanguine aesthetic qualities of low horror genres like exploitation and gore films, then they must not be considered art. Superstar filmmakers like Breillat and Denis should know better than to lower themselves to such standards.[56]

Horeck and Kendall, in their introduction to *The New Extremism in Cinema*, acknowledge this shared history when they discuss their use of the "new extremism": "In using this term, we do not wish to suggest that the extremism of these films is unprecedented . . . Graphic representation and the traditions of artistic transgression have complex histories, and the definition of what one takes to constitute extreme is notoriously subjective, slippery and bound by historical and social pressures."[57]

Nonetheless, the history of the horror film is filled with texts which push at the boundaries of social norms and balk at the restrictiveness of social pressures. The desire of the horror audience to see the unshowable represented onscreen fuels the genre's persistent popularity. As noted by Mikita Brottman, "many of the moviegoers [to *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973)]...claim that

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[56] The history and visual language of on-screen brutality is a long one, detailed in the PCA and New Hollywood era in a number of texts, including *Classical Film Violence* by Stephen Prince, and by Karla Oeler, whose book *A Grammar of Murder* traces modes of violent representation and transgression across a wide range of films and theoretical examples, from Soviet montage through the classical European art cinema to the films of Stanley Kubrick and Jim Jarmusch. Both of these texts take as their subject the ways in which filmmakers have used generic convention and the established language of cinema to represent violence and brutality under regulation. Prince delineates the general increase in on screen brutality throughout the 50s and 60s, eventually ending with the advent of the New Hollywood filmmakers and the depiction of entry and exit wounds for gunshots. Oeler examines the ways in which classical theory and production intersect in the modern era, including the iconographic use of mirrors in Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980), for example.

[57] Horeck and Kendall, "Introduction," 5.

the film traumatized and terrified them, yet they also describe themselves as 'fans.'"[58] There is a need, on the part of audience and filmmaker, for the experience of the abject as a cultural provocation to keep that popularity alive. If a film is perceived as heavily censored or outright banned, the desire of the audience to see its controversial footage is heightened considerably.[59]

The films of the new extremism function in similar fashion. Some films associated with the movement are embroiled in controversy from the very moment of their premiere, though this controversy may not always translate successfully into ticket sales. There remains some divide in the method of marketing the mainstream horror film and art film, an issue that I will take up to a limited extent in Chapter 3. Nonetheless I have shown that the new extremism shares a common lineage with the development of the modern horror film and the increased brutality of the form.

In turning to *Trouble Every Day*, I will now show how the films of the new extremism are in conversation with that history of gore and brutality. I will also delineate how this lineage has gone largely unacknowledged by scholars and some popular critics in their discussion of the new extremism.

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[58] Mikita Brottman, "Foreward," in *The New Extremism in Cinema: From France to Europe*, xiii.

[59] *The Human Centipede II* and *A Serbian Film* (Srdjan Spasojevic, 2010), both released theatrically and on the festival circuit in 2011 were banned or heavily censored in various countries. News articles on their censorship or banning typically reported that the filmmakers would employ their status as culturally undesirable objects as a means of further marketing the films. See an article on *Human Centipede II* at AICN (Nordling, "Human Centipede Ii Banned in Britain," http://www.aintitcool.com/node/49927.) or the one-star review from *The Guardian* which details some of *Human Centipede II*'s banning in the UK and the praise the reviewer associates with the defenders of the film's director (Catherine Shoard, "Human Centipede 2 – Review," http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2011/oct/12/human-centipede-2-review.).

The plot of *Trouble Every Day*, which is presented in an elliptical ordering of events typical of Denis's style, contains two strands of common interest, which eventually intersect with a quiet cataclysm. A woman named Coré (Béatrice Dalle) is living in Paris with her husband, where she is confined to her bedroom as a means to keep her from leaving the house and killing and eating men she seduces on the outskirts of the city. She nonetheless succeeds in breaking out and giving in to her consumptive impulse, each time leaving it to her husband to find her and clean up her mess. Meanwhile Shane (Vincent Gallo) and his wife arrive in Paris from America on their honeymoon, though Shane has an ulterior motive for visiting the city. He has begun to have erotic visions of his wife covered in blood - slick, red and wallowing in their bed. When they arrive at their hotel he is immediately attracted to the maid, and he fights hard to keep his impulse intact.

Eventually we learn that Shane, Coré and her husband all used to work together for a pharmaceutical company in French Guyana. They were experimenting with genetic modifications and the healing powers of certain plants, and Shane and Coré somehow both contracted some kind of disease, either through testing on themselves or, as is somewhat implied by the film, during the course of an affair with one another. As a symptom of the disease they carry, they both developed a cannibalistic impulse, removed from the mere consumption of human flesh by the way in which they are turned on by the act of attacking in the throes of sexual ecstasy. The cannibalistic impulse is sexual in

nature, and in each of their attacks, they seduce their prey before biting into them during intercourse.

Claire Denis's *Trouble Every Day* premiered at the 2001 Cannes Film Festival and was, as *The Guardian* put it, "the first full-blown scandal" of the annual event. The film divided critics upon its very first showing. French critic Jean-Paul Marcier of Premiere was quoted in *The Guardian* newspaper as saying, "The film is terrible. There is no redeeming context. The horror seems quite gratuitous...I can't admire this."[60] Many of the positive reviews noted the similarities between *Trouble Every Day* and Denis's other films, especially of the equally physical *Beau Travail* (1999). In his review for *Slant*, Ed Gonzales wrote, "As elegant and mysterious as *Beau Travail*, *Trouble Every Day* demonstrates director Claire Denis's signature obsession with the human body, cultural rifts and the permissions of sex."[61]

The major rift between the negative and positive interpretations of the film seems to hinge on whether or not its centerpiece provides anything worthwhile to the experience of it. In an excruciating and horrific five minute scene in which star Béatrice Dalle consumes pieces of her young sexual partner while they are engaged in intercourse and then plays with his wounds as he's suffering death, the film engages with the low cultural worth of the horror film's brutal violence. The sequence is also upsetting because it stops the flow of narrative, moving on

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[60] Flachra Gibbons and Stuart Jeffries, "Cannes Audience Left Open-Mouthed," *The Guardian*, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2001/may/14/cannes2001.cannesfilmfestival.
[61] Ed Gonzalez, "Trouble Every Day," http://www.slantmagazine.com/film/review/trouble-every-day/361.

to a different scene before cutting back to Coré's attack. In fact, it comes up over and over and over again in discussions of the film. Whether it is referred to as "gratuitous" or as a variation on Denis's "signature obsession," there is no question that the explicit depiction of cannibalism in several scenes of the film, foremost this one, is the divisive factor of interpretation.

In discussing *Trouble Every Day* as it relates to the gore film, I am not trying to make a point that the film is pornographic in any way. Compared to some of the other films in the new extremism, the film is somewhat less explicit in its use of gore and its depiction of sex. This does not mean that the gore and the sex are not graphic and disturbing. Rather, I wish to point out that within context of those other films, in which the audience is forced into confrontational close-ups of bleeding labia, hardcore sex and extended sequences of rape and mutilation, Denis's film presents a restrained effort to represent the human body's evacuative and consumptive possibilities. And yet it reverts to hardcore violence in its exploration of sexual desire in a manner as explicit as and sometimes more so than mainstream horror films.

Denis's response to her critics at Cannes was also noted in the article published in *The Guardian* mentioned above. The statement is framed around her identity as an art film director, and also points to her own insistence that *Trouble Every Day* is not to be considered a horror film:

> Denis, who has a reputation for her sensitive portrayals of women and individuals on the edge of society, insisted last night at a tense press conference, at which Dalle pointedly refused to appear at the last minute, that the film was not "explicit or violent. It's actually a

> love story. Being explicit is not what I'm interested in and I don't think it's about cannibalism either.
>
> "It's about desire and how close the kiss is to the bite. I think every mother wants to eat her baby with love. We just took this on to a new frontier." Her scriptwriter Jean-Paul Fargeau said they wanted to look at the way such block-busters as *Hannibal* had made gore acceptable in the cinema. "I wanted to write something about desire and about the unknown areas within the brain, where we go, but would rather not admit we go."[62]

In an interview with the BBC, Denis says she thinks "gore is cynical" and "this film is not cynical at all." Quoting Jean-Luc Godard, Denis states that in cinema, blood is the color red and continues, "gore is not blood. It's an expression that expresses something about blood and wounds that is, to me, very cynical..."[63] Here Denis seems to be distinguishing between the "post-modern inflections" Ben McCann sees as a difference between American and French millennial horror films, and the serious nature of her own artistic project. But in the horror film gore is not always cynical. It can be satirical, or used for comic effect, but if taken within the context of cynicism as to whether or not something is worthwhile–in this case the use of gore over blood, the latter being acceptable to Denis–the modern horror film is invested in explicit blood and guts gore as central to its affect.[64]

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[62] Gibbons and Jeffries, "Cannes Audience Left Open-Mouthed".
[63] Jonathan Carter, "Director Claire Denis Talks Blood and Gore with Collective," http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/collective/A904123.
[64] As a counter-example to Denis's assertion that gore is always ironic, in *Jennifer's Body* (Karyn Kusama, 2009), high school popular girl Jennifer becomes possessed and must consume her classmates in order to remain alive. While situated firmly within the horror-comedy sub-genre, the film's aesthetics remain very much within the sanguine aesthetics of the modern horror film and the gore itself is never played for laughs in a knowing manner as it might be in films like the *Evil Dead* series (Sam Raimi, 1981-1992) where the gore itself is part of the joke. When Jennifer is covered in blood at various points in the film it is played fairly straight and as horrific to other

While there are many reasons one might wish to watch horror films, or to see the explicit representations of violent death in them, there is not one single reason we are drawn to these "unknown areas." This may be similar to the reasons we slow down to rubberneck at a traffic accident. We are naturally brought into confrontations with death out of our own curious natures. But the distinction Denis seems to be making here is telling in its relationship to the gore hounds and their reasons for watching horror. Unlike those viewers "who derive delight from the jolts and suspense" and "get their enjoyment because they identify and empathize with the spills and thrills of the victims," those who are attracted specifically to the gore content of a horror film "get pleasure from horror movies specifically as a function of how much blood, guts, torture, and mayhem are depicted."[65] The delineation of viewer types is important for how we will continue to work through *Trouble Every Day* as it relates to the gore film.

In the presentation of her argument, Denis points to her own project of using the horror film, particularly its language of violence brutality and gore, to explore the theme of desire and violence in the relationships of the characters in *Trouble Every Day*. The language employed to describe the film on her terms in *The Guardian* and again to the BBC is the language of Barbara Creed in her description of the archaic mother and the *monstrous-feminine* in general:

> The desires and fears invoked by the image of the archaic mother, as a force that threatens to reincorporate what it once gave birth to,

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characters who interact with her, just like Coré when she is covered in the blood of her current victim. This is especially true when Jennifer is in her monstrous, cannibalistic mode (another resonance with Denis's film).

[65] Herz, *That's Disgusting : Unraveling the Mysteries of Repulsion*, 140.

> are always there in the horror text–all pervasive, all encompassing–because of the constant presence of death.[66]

When Denis says that she thinks that "every mother wants to eat her baby with love," she is voicing the desires and fears that any number of horror films service with their explicit gore–the abjection of the human body. Creed describes the role of the abject in the modern horror film as "that which crosses or threatens to cross the 'border'...Although the specific nature of the border changes from film to film, the function of the monstrous remains the same–to bring about an encounter between the symbolic order and that which threatens its stability."[67] When Coré bites her victim and plays with his flesh as he screams in pain, or when Shane bites the genitals of the hotel maid at the end of the film, we cross the "border" of the symbolic order and are confronted with the threat of our own transformation into something "other" than ourselves.

Creed's psychoanalytic and feminist reading of the horror film may not be the most useful for thinking through *Trouble Every Day*'s relationship to gore, but it does provide a way of thinking about its relationship to the horror film's depiction of monstrosity, which in this movie is one and the same. In *Trouble Every Day* Coré and Shane are consumers of flesh and blood, and thus very much the monstrous figures of the horror film, even if they are human and even if they are filled with sexual and spiritual desire. The scenes of biting and playing with their victims are presented explicitly, with plenty of blood and flayed flesh,

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[66] Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine : Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1993), 28.
[67] Ibid., 11.

and accompanied by a disturbing use of screams, laughing and non-diegetic music on the soundtrack exemplifying the tactics of sensationalism employed by the modern horror film and, specifically, the mondo-exploitation tradition. This point has been given short shrift in the scholarly literature on the film, but has been duly noted in a variety of different popular articles, reviews and postings on message boards by horror fans.

Judith Mayne's recent book on Claire Denis, a scholarly examination of the director and her films, accounts for *Trouble Every Day*'s relationship to the horror film in the gothic vampire tradition. "Like many of the stories that inspired it, and the vampire tradition in particular, *Trouble Every Day* shows how various forms of science and research attempt to contain the very object they are presumably interested in exploring."[68] While she does note that Denis drew some inspiration from the genre, including *Cat People* (Jacques Tourneur,1942 and remade in a more erotic vein by Paul Schrader in 1982) and *The Addiction* (Abel Ferrera, 1995), both films preoccupied with "the unsettling anxiety that can emanate from everyday situations, and the anxieties associated with sexuality, particularly insofar as violence, pleasure, and satisfaction are concerned,"[69] Mayne does not delve into *Trouble Every Day*'s relationship with explicit representation of the human body onscreen, at least outside of the context of the critics being upset by the presentation of the gore itself.

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[68] Judith Mayne, *Claire Denis* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 109.
[69] Ibid., 109.

In her description of the scene in which Coré attacks the teenager in her room while having sex with him, Mayne states, “The scene is shot at very close range, and in the dark, both of which heighten the sense of the forbidden and the mysterious. But the sounds, the guttural screams of the young man and the excited cries of Coré, make clear what is happening.”[70] This description of the scene and its construction of the horrific act is imprecise. For one, the scene does take place in darkness, but it is well-lit, and we can make out pieces of flesh and dripping blood very clearly. And while Mayne does point to the soundtrack as a site of transgression, she does not mention the music, which is haunting and poetic, and which serves to highlight the more disturbing sounds heard during the ordeal.

It is important to note the differences in Mayne’s description of the scene and what is shown on screen in order to fully understand the visceral nature of the explicit violence. Instead of Coré’s “excited cries” and the young man’s “guttural screams,” it is very much the graphic visual image that bothers many of the film’s critics. The duration of the image, the length of time we are made to visually witness the act of killing, in gory detail, is central to the film’s repulsiveness.

After a teenager breaks into her house, Coré entices him into her bedroom where they begin making love. The scene begins with close-ups of her hands running over the boy’s body, with heavy breathing on the soundtrack. After we see her inserting him, the camera pulls back into a medium close-up, cutting

[70] Ibid., 106.

between various shots of Coré riding him and kissing his face, neck, and chest. Music is added to the soundtrack, and the heavy breathing becomes intertwined with slow drumming and violins in a sound mix which conveys a steamy, possibly dangerous sex scene. We know this danger is real from previous scenes in which Coré must be cleaned up and contained after unseen attacks add to the eeriness of the scene's construction as erotic.

Coré's kisses eventually turn into light biting as she grows nearer to sexual climax and the teenager's sighs become heavier and deeper. She slaps him and nips at him before finally leaning in for a kiss and biting at his lip, chewing and ripping it from his face. It is important to note that, in contrast with Mayne's description of this scene as "dark" and mysterious, as if we cannot see what is happening, this action is very clear and very graphic. As Coré pulls his lip off, we see blood and spit string from her lips down to where his used to be and she continues to chew.

After a brief cutaway - the narrative interruption mentioned earlier - to Shane waiting on a woman from a research lab he visited earlier to give him information on where he can find Coré and her husband, we return to the scene, Coré and her victim bloodier than when we last saw them. She is playing with him, taunting him as he dies, and fingers a bit of flesh which has been partially bitten away from his shoulder, prodding, poking and flicking it. The music has ceased and the only thing on the soundtrack is the teenager's belabored

breathing and wheezing, and Core's fast breathing and a moan, sexual gratification complete.

This final shot, the most graphic in the entire film, is only about the prolonged display of suffering and the "money shot" that gore-hounds are obsessed with: the special effect of the boy's flesh ripped from his shoulder and prodded by his killer for no other purpose than to disturb and shock. There is no narrative reason to return to the scene, yet Denis does so, only to show us the monster taunting and torturing the boy and to display the realistic gore of the abject human body.

In popular reviews there are repeated references to the film's "gore and gristle,"[71] and "orgiastic bloodbaths."[72] In his review for *Slant*, Ed Gonzalez noted that the finale, in which Shane seduces and attacks the hotel maid, "could very well be the most brutal rape ever put to film, no so much for the graphic nature of the kill but for its many layers."[73] If we have been shown rape before–and controversies over their brutality, in the horror films *The Last House on the Left* and *I Spit On Your Grave* (Meir Zarchi, 1978), or over the problematics of its presentation as in *Straw Dogs* (Sam Peckinpah, 1971) and *Strange Days* (Kathryn Bigelow, 1995)–what is it that makes this scene exceptional and more difficult to sit through than mainstream films which depict the same subject in

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[71] Scott Tobias, "Trouble Every Day," http://www.avclub.com/articles/trouble-every-day,20628/.
[72] Stephen Holden, "Film Review; Erotic Horror with Enough Gore to Distress Dracula," *New York Times*, http://www.nytimes.com/2002/03/01/movies/film-review-erotic-horror-with-enough-gore-to-distress-dracula.html?src=pm.
[73] Gonzalez, "Trouble Every Day".

very similar ways?[74] Any possible knowledge provided by the film about why Shane and Coré have been attacking people which could contextualize or provide "layers" of meaning aside, it is the deployment of explicit gore and brutality which serves as the distinguishing factor.

Shane's attack and rape of the maid is presented in a similar manner to Coré's attack on the teenager earlier in the film, but it lasts for a much shorter time and is less graphic, though it uses copious amounts of blood and leaves very little to the imagination. As he enters the employee locker room in the basement of the hotel where the maid is changing out of her work clothes, there is only the spare plucking of a few notes on a harp on the soundtrack. After the music stops we only hear the hum of the fluorescent lights in the room and the movements of Shane and the maid. He approaches her at the locker and she turns and begins kissing him. He presses her back against the locker and they kiss passionately. He becomes aggressive and domineering, pushing her hands above her head on the locker and then moving her forcefully to the ground.

At this point it is uncertain as to whether or not she has been playing along willingly, though this changes quickly as Shane forces himself on top and inside of her, ripping her panties off. She begins to struggle as he becomes more forceful, his kisses and humping becoming more rapid and determined as he

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[74] Three of these films have been remade in the 2000s, each one corresponding to the increased brutality I describe in my discussion of the influence of the mondo film. *Strange Days*, which saw some controversy due to its thematization of the desire to watch rape and murder and its depictions of those acts vis-a-vis first-person point-of-view, has not been updated. Gaspar Noé's *Irreversible* would come out the next year, in 2002, and would stir up significantly more controversy with its depiction of rape in a now infamous scene where Monica Bellucci is assaulted in a tunnel.

forces her hands to her sides, stopping her from hitting his face as he rapes her. He begins biting her lightly and she screams as he moves down her body and begins to perform oral sex. He bites her genitals and she begins to scream louder, similar to the shrieks which issued forth from the boy when Coré began biting pieces of his flesh off. As the maid begins crying, Shane rises and his mouth is smeared with blood. He moves up her body and, again mirroring Coré, kisses and smears the blood all over the maid's face. The scene ends with a cut to the maid's body being dragged away and Shane wiping his face and hands on some of the towels in the laundry room, attempting to hide the evidence of his sexual and violent activities.

It is striking that anyone could watch this rape and not associate the gore with its essentially disturbing nature. The scene's direct reference to Coré's attack earlier in the film now fully manifest in Shane's actions is not more disturbing now than it was then. We have effectively seen this scene earlier in the film, almost shot for shot, though it is presented here under the guise of a prolonged seduction. Shane's conquest of the maid is abrupt here but his seduction has been threaded throughout the film's narrative, beginning shortly after his arrival in Paris, leading to this final confrontation and transformation. What I find makes this scene shocking on its own, once again aside from any meaningful thematic relationship to the violence of sexual desire pointed to by academics and popular critics, is the genital mutilation. Though not as visually explicit, this retains an overtly brutal presentation in its lack of music on the

soundtrack and in the act of genital mutilation being rendered explicit by the traditionally executed rape scene occurring beforehand. We know what is happening without being shown.[75]

A handful of the reviews acknowledge the disturbing aspect of the film's explicit gore as being central to the experience of *Trouble Every Day*, echoing the basis of concerns by critics of the film that the horror seems gratuitous and unbecoming. These same reviews do not discount the film's art film aesthetics or the stamp of Denis as a filmmaker - elliptical narrative structure, themes concerning eroticism and the colonial past of France - but push toward a more complete view of *Trouble Every Day* as a hybrid mixture of many genres and styles which is key to understanding the films of the new extremism.

A review of the film on FearZone.com states that the rape "culminates in a scene that'll make you never want to have (or perform) oral sex again."[76] On the IMDB message boards for the film, user "universe940-3," who is unfamiliar with Denis as a filmmaker, writes, "This was as if someone sifted up a shovels worth of raw sewerage and somehow transmogrified it into cinematic form.."[77] These reviews, one from an online horror fan site and another a negative opinion of the film posted in the user-generated content section of IMDB, single out the gore and sexual violence as a central component of the film's reception. The horror of

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[75] Other films of the new extremism are even more explicit in this regard. Lars von Trier's *Antichrist* notoriously features not only violence perpetrated on male genitals but also features an extreme close-up of Charlotte Gainsbourg's character cutting her clitoris off with a pair of scissors.

[76] Gemma Files, "Cool and Dark: Trouble Every Day," http://www.fearzone.com/blog/cool-trouble.

[77] universe940-3, "Whoever Filmed This Abomination . . ." http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0204700/board/thread/128642973?d=132573656&p=1#132573656.

the film, even contained within preconceived notions of an art film or ideas of what a “Claire Denis film” is or should be, is central not only as a mode of representation, but also as a method of reception. If the film were merely an erotic exercise with no gore or blood, or “spumes of sperm” to return to Quandt’s language, the impact of the film would be very different. We would have no need to even consider its relationship to the critically frowned-upon forms of the horror film which have as their exclusive interest the gross-out moment, the gory “money shot.” Yet here we are, and there it is. The sex and violence are both too disturbing to be erotic, a sentiment expressed by critics of many films in the new extremism.

Shane’s desire to consume first manifests in the film as he dreams of his wife wallowing in the bloody sheets of the bed on their honeymoon. Later he contemplates her body as she is bathing, pubic hair drifting in the water and he gazes down at her from above. He asks her, “Are you afraid?” In the midst of making love he quits abruptly, fearful of his own desires and the onset of his cannibalistic impulses and goes to the bathroom to masturbate, ejaculating on the corner of the bathtub as his wife pounds on the door asking him what is wrong. This moment, the literal “money shot” of the film, is release for the audience, the opening shot from which we know going forward that we are in for something uncompromising and uninhibited.

That first warning shot, in which Shane’s body literally releases the tension which any gore-hound feels as a meat movie heads toward its first bloody

encounter with the abject body, is the first indication that showing the unshowable will be key to the film's project of confrontation with its audience. *Trouble Every Day* adheres to the conventions of both the art film and the horror film in various ways, and in this scene we see the desires about which Denis speaks when she discusses the film literalized. It is the explicit nature of desire and our desire to see the unshowable which gives birth to the brutalizing gore aesthetics employed by the film. The gore of cannibalistic desire and murder, and the sperm on the bathtub which symbolizes the enactment of that desire, is central to our response to the film. This is a point not made in other discussions of the new extremism.

As I have shown, these films are in active dialogue with the modern horror film's brutality and explicit bloodletting. *Trouble Every Day*, as an example of many different international art films released between the late-1990s and into the new millennium, shares many commonalities with the mondo film, cannibalism in particular, and with the brutal visual and aural aesthetics of re-makes of classic slasher and exploitation films in the 2000s. The explicit display of the abject human body is the distinguishing factor in these films, whether it be violent content or explicit nudity.

In the next chapter, we will see how similarly executed scenes of gore and violence function in millennial horror films in France and the United States. We will carry on the discussion of the aesthetics of art and horror cinemas apparent in the new extremism as we have seen in our discussion of *Trouble Every Day*.

We will also see how the adoption of narrative techniques from the art cinema, including the manipulation of time, serves to assault the viewer of millennial horror films, leaving them repulsed and exhausted.

Chapter Three:
Gore, Abjection and Political Allegory in Millennial Horror Films

The specter of 9/11, like Vietnam in the 1970s, or the Cold War in the 1950s, haunts the images of these films. Audiences, exposed to news footage of the World Trade Center attacks, the London transit bombings in 2005, and the highly circulated images of various other terrorist attacks, were almost certainly aware of similar images in the horror cinema of the 2000s.

Terrorists use the incomprehensibility of their violence as a way of terrorizing not their victims, but their victims-to-be. An act of terrorism imparts in our minds the knowledge that this terrible, violent event could also happen to us. Given that this was the context within which millennial horror films were conceived, produced, and received, it should be taken into account when discussing these horror films and their brutal, explicit violence.

That the brutality of these films was often cause for critics to denounce them as worthless also speaks to the disappearance of images of political violence in popular media through the middle of the decade. For example, though images of the World Trade Center attacks were highly circulated in the days immediately following 9/11, they were withdrawn from public circulation in the news-media for a long period of time.[78] The images of the attacks, including the planes crashing into the towers, the towers' collapse, and the "falling man"

[78] See Laura Frost's "Black Screens, Lost Bodies: The Cinematic Apparatus of 9/11 Horror" in *Horror after 9/11: World of Fear, Cinema of Terror*, ed. Sam J. Miller and Aviva Briefel (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), which describes the use of black screens in films about the 9/11 attacks in relation to the suppression of similar images in both print and televised news-media.

images of people committing suicide by leaping from windows during the attack, were all hidden away, relegated to internet forums and websites, and generally treated as similar to the mythical snuff films that private collectors reportedly traded on 8 and 16mm film and later on VHS in cult film circles, but which seem to have never existed.

By removing the images of political violence from the public discourse, they became literally incomprehensible; the terror of the event was unknowable unless a new image cropped up, which is of course what happened after 9/11. The terrorists kept attacking randomly, and the victims-to-be were continually exposed to new and terrible ways they could possibly die. In this way, cultural anxieties about political violence in the 2000s became literally repressed, yet continually re-emerged in news-media and circulating images on the Internet. Thecultural anxieties regarding incomprehensible, violent death can be seen to manifest themselves as in the abjections of the human bodies of millennial horror films.

I wish to make a case as to why the films in this neglected cycle of contemporary American and French cinema should be seen for what they are and what they do, and for how this can broaden our understanding of the accepted art films which comprise a movement like the new extremism. In order to do so, it is necessary for us to understand the relationship between the American remake cycle and the various films of the 2000s which appropriate the imagery and stylistic tropes of Seventies exploitation horror, but utilize an

aesthetics of duration similar to that of the art cinema in order to affect a new brutality on screen. For Alexandre Aja, the director of *Haute Tension*, the films of the 1970s were of particular importance to the writing of his film, which was a chance "to relive again this very specific spirit...a very nasty, savage spirit." The American horror films of that decade thus provide a guidepost not only for their direct remakes, but also inspire the look, feel and tone of many horror films made in the United States and France in the 2000s.

As noted by many critics, a key component of French horror's international success was its similarities to very popular trends in the American market, especially the "torture porn" and remake cycles, both of which were instrumental in the increase of brutal and gory content in the United States. The remake cycle of the 2000s largely consists of updated slashers - *Halloween*, *The Hills Have Eyes*, *Friday the 13th*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, etc. And for our purposes we will also consider the mid-decade interest in low-budget grindhouse films of the 1970s - stylistic guides for many films, not just horror, but certainly including films such as *The Devil's Rejects* and the double-feature *Grindhouse* - which traffic in the generic tropes of many horror sub-genres.

The slasher is defined by Carol Clover as a genre whose "elements are familiar: the killer is the psychotic product of a sick family, but still recognizably human; the victim is a beautiful, sexually active woman; the location is not-home, at a Terrible Place; the weapon is something other than a gun; the attack is registered from the victim's point of view and comes with shocking

suddenness."[79] The remakes of these films are gorier and more brutal than their predecessors. Whether this is an attempt to appease the genre's fans with new shocks and special effects or to simply present something more than just the same film over again does not matter. The blood is more realistic, the sound design more caustic and cacophonous, and the victims often faceless shells set up only to be mowed down by the killer. This last point is not very different from the original films, particularly in regard to the multitude of sequels those films spawned, but is presented differently, more brutally and brutalizingly, and certainly more explicitly.

We must also consider the "torture porn" cycle as a major influence on the direction and interpretation of the genre in the 2000s. The "torture porn" films are not slashers, but share many of the same tropes and imagery. In this cycle the breaking down of the body is the focus of the plot, the sole reason any event in the film takes place. In *Hostel* and *Hostel Part Two*, the backpacking American students are abducted because the killer has paid a secret organization to do so in order that they may torture and then kill them. In the *Saw* films, the victims awake stuck in sadistic traps which force them to mutilate themselves or someone else in order to survive their ordeal. Brigid Cherry writes that in *Saw* "the only thing the victims are expected to do is enter into the game that is being played without fully knowing the rules or the motivation of the game-master," the serial killer Jigsaw.[80] Increasingly the *Saw* series becomes a showcase only for

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[79] Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws : Gender in the Modern Horror Film*24.
[80] Cherry, *Horror* , 201.

the inventiveness of its traps. The plot becomes unnecessarily convoluted and difficult to follow. This is due in large part to the introduction of serialized elements - the last half of the series follows a police investigation of the killer, including one of the detectives who was at one time held captive by him - and retroactive continuity, in which later plot developments that could not have taken place in earlier films reshape and reframe the narrative of those early entries in order for the current film to make sense.

Perhaps spurred on by the success of *Saw* in 2004 and *Hostel* in 2005, as well as the more graphic *Texas Chainsaw* re-do in 2003, the remakes incorporate more and more gore and abject bodies throughout the decade. This accumulation of gore and kills reaches an apotheosis with Marcus Nispel's *Friday the 13th* (2009), in which the self-seriousness and nihilism which are hallmarks of the cycle's brutality becomes unintentionally self-parodic. In the remake Jason Voorhees stalks and kills two entirely different sets of teens, and this after the climactic battle between his mother and the Final Girl from the Jason-less original *Friday* takes place over the title sequence. Three slasher films in one, none of them very engaging.

I wish to point out here that parody and self-reflexivity exist throughout the history of the horror genre for multiple reasons. It can be unknowingly parodic, as in the *Friday the 13th* remake, or tongue-in-cheek like Wes Craven's *Scream* series (1996-2011) or his *New Nightmare* (1994), which changes the rules of Craven's ground-breaking *Nightmare on Elm Street* (Craven, 1984) by imagining

the killer capable of escaping the increasingly moronic films in the franchise and entering the real world to terrorize the original film's lead actress. Despite whether or not the film acknowledges its self-reflexive nature, the films work *as such* only for certain audiences. This does not include satire like the *Scary Movie* (Keenan Ivory Wayans, et al., 2000-2013) franchise, which appeals to broad audiences by adopting an anything-goes approach to comedy featuring constant pop-culture gags. On the other hand, there are films such as *Shaun of the Dead* (Edgar Wright, 2004) and *The Evil Dead 2: Dead by Dawn* (Sam Raimi, 1987), which have as their aim joking alongside fans with a deep knowledge of the horror film.

The self-reflexivity of the horror film is directly tied to its history as a low-culture object. Films in the remake cycle, including original stories fashioned after period-specific grindhouse releases, utilize constant references to the genre's lineage in order to demonstrate their *bona fides*. The genre fan, who views gore in a different mode than the average filmgoer, with an appreciation for its special effects wizardry as well as its purpose as a disgusting component of horror, knows that there is a direct link between the shower scene in *Psycho* and the chase through the abattoir that caps off the remake of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. They know that the mad scientist Herbert West in *Re-Animator* (Stuart Gordon, 1985) shares a rich generic tradition all the way back to not just the Universal monster movies of the 1930s but all the way back to Edison's *Frankenstein* (J. Searle Dawley, 1910).

For fans of a maligned genre, the self-reflexivity in its films which acknowledge their points of origin function like a calling card with which to acknowledge one of their own. This is especially true of the horror film. But how does this self-reflexivity function in the remake cycle? How does utilizing well-known generic forms inform the reception of gore in the 2000s? I think that the horror fan is capable of being horrified despite their knowledge of special effects or of generic tropes, otherwise there is no point in watching hundreds of horror films.

In the remake and "torture porn" cycles, the body is rendered abject no matter what the expectations of the genre may be. The body, as well as the spectator, often with no real sense of identification, is brutalized and broken down in both instances, regardless of the slasher's traditional rendering of gender issues as central to its narrative.

To demonstrate these similarities and differences, we will turn to Rob Zombie's *The Devil's Rejects* and Alexandre Aja's *Haute Tension*. Both of these films exist outside of the torture porn and remake cycles directly, but nonetheless share many of their hallmarks. They each utilize grueling, ultra-realistic gore (the result of practical effects in most cases) in order to disgust their audience.[81] And they both adopt older modes of representation - here the exploitation films of the 1970s - which creates an ambiguous relationship with their audience, disallowing

[81] Practical effects, as opposed to digital effects, are effects which are constructed physically by a special effects team. In horror films these effects are typically make-up and gore effects (life-like limbs, artificial blood, etc.) which preserve the film's realism as they are able to be captured in-camera and interact with the actors and characters on screen.

their identification with main characters and protagonists and leaving them on their own with the films' monsters for much of the screen time.

The Devil's Rejects is a sequel to Zombie's 2001 debut *House of 1000 Corpses*. It continues to follow the monstrous Firefly family, a group of mass-murdering necrophiliac possibly-cannibal rednecks, though it makes an intriguing change to the first film's more traditional slasher narrative. Instead of providing a group of victim-protagonists who must fend off the family (and certain death), Zombie puts the Firefly clan front-and-center, sets the film concretely in the 1970s, and creates a pastiche of various exploitation elements: documentary stylization, explicit scenes of rape and murder, and a lack of a moral center. By forcing the audience to relate only to the Firefly family and their exploits, the film also updates a common trope of 70s horror in that the viewer is left adrift with no anchor in a sea that contains only monsters.

While providing another echo of Seventies horror films such as *Last House on the Left*, the abandoning of the audience to the whims of the killer also calls to mind *Psycho*, further demonstrating its influence on the genre. Marion Crane (Janet Leigh), the film's focal point for the first half hour, is killed off and the audience is left at the Bates Motel with Norman (Anthony Perkins), who has just killed her. Who are we supposed to identify with here? In *The Devil's Rejects*, and with a nod to the film's own self-reflexive nature as a genre text, Zombie adopts the motel as another space in which the hope of identification is killed off.

The most horrific set-piece, in which Otis (Bill Moseley) and Baby (Sheri Moon Zombie) abduct and terrorize a touring country-western band, allows this inability of the audience to relate to any of the main characters to be played out within the film. After shooting their clueless roadie Jimmy (Brian Posehn) as he comes back to the motel after a trip to the gas station, Otis and Baby sexually assault the two women, and the men are brutally murdered a short time later in the middle of the desert, one of their faces carved off and worn as a mask by Otis upon his return to the motel room.

This sequence demonstrates that this movie will allow no identification with any character who could conceivably be thought of as good or heroic. Not only are we introduced to the only moral characters in the film–the band at the motel, Banjo & Sullivan (Geoffrey Lewis, Priscilla Barnes, Lew Temple, and Kate Norby)–over half an hour into the film, they are also dispatched with by the killers after only a short period of time, brutally and suddenly. When Otis dons the face of one of his victims, he mocks our identification with him as much as when he places the face-mask on the man's wife, who they leave alive only to be discovered by the maid the next morning, driven crazy by having worn her husband's face while bound in captivity. As if to provide yet a further mockery of the audience, this survivor then dies only moments later, splattered across the highway by a truck.

The sadistic nature with which the audience is treated in these sequences goes beyond the film's roots in 1970s exploitation horror. Though it invokes the

helplessness at the hands of a ruthless group of killers as in films such as *Last House on the Left* and *The Hills Have Eyes*, and draws distinct parallels between the Firefly family and the Manson family (down to Otis's wild-eyed, heavily bearded rendering of Charles himself), *The Devil's Rejects* is also very much a product of its own time.

In the finale, Sheriff Wydell (William Forsythe), who has pursued them throughout the film, holds the family captive in their home. Otis, Baby and Captain Spaulding (the patriarch, played by Sid Haig) are strapped into chairs, have nails driven through their hands, and photographs of their victims stapled to their chests. That their torture comes at the hands of law and order should come as no surprise since at this time the official policy of the United States government, and thus of its law enforcement officials, was to use torture against its enemies in the War on Terror. If traditional understandings of viewer identification in horror films is that the audience aligns itself with the powers of good over those of evil, *The Devil's Rejects* once again subverts that expectation, and suggests that if we are the enforcers of the law, then perhaps we can be as sadistic as our enemies.

The antagonistic relationship between film and audience is also evident in *Haute Tension*, though not as overt. There is not the level of winking self-reflexivity at work as there is in *The Devil's Rejects*, but it nonetheless demonstrates a familiarity with the conventions of the slasher sub-genre which it then subverts in various ways.

Haute Tension is the story of two friends, Marie (Cécile De France) and Alexia (Maïwenn), away from school on holiday at Alexia's family home in the countryside. A stranger comes to the house in the middle of the night and brutally murders all of Alexia's family - father, mother, and young brother - before throwing her in the back of his work truck and taking off into the night. The rest of the film follows Marie as she attempts to free her friend from the killer.

As a slasher, the majority of the film is fairly standard: Marie evades a rampaging killer while he slaughters everyone else. Adhering to Carol Clover's articulation of the Final Girl in theformulaic plot of the slasher film, Marie must defeat the monster in order to restore balance to the symbolic order. Also, in line with the American remake cycle, the kills are extremely violent and feature copious amounts of blood and gore, and the sound design is overwhelming.

The particular way in which the film betrays its audience is in the structure of the film's finale. Marie, tracked through the forest by the killer, wraps a fence post in barbed wire and attacks him, beating him repeatedly across the face. She is then strangled by him after she checks to see if he is dead, at which point Marie suffocates him with some plastic sheeting. Finally, the killer defeated, Marie heads to his truck to free her friend Alexia, where we learn that she has held Alexia captive the whole time. The film then resumes its extreme violence, relishing the length of its depiction as an all-out assault on its audience. This conclusion, according to Matthias Hurst, has disturbing implications for the film's

plot and the audience's interpretation of it (including the many questions which begin to stack up very quickly upon this revelation):

> And while these questions remain unanswered and the absurdity of the whole story starts to solidify, we witness the hysterical climax of the film: Marie as the mad truck driver, covered with blood, chasing Alex with a screeching circular saw through the woods *à la* Leatherface, screaming and grunting. A filmic presentation of shot and reverse-shot is showing the running victim and the murderous maniac in a familiar situation of horror and mayhem, recreating the emblematic image of the slasher genre. This exaggerated scene, now tainted by our knowledge of the artificial construction of the plot, is near to parody. . . At this moment the audience is made aware of the constrained artificiality of these horror scenarios, and the explosion of gross violence combined with the implosion of narrative logic literally deconstructs the genre.[82]

While much of Hurst's reading of *Haute Tension* is focused on the role gender plays in the narrative, this passage points to the particular method in which the film upends generic expectation in its orgiastic use of violence concurrent with the revelation that the killer and Final Girl are one and the same person. The implosion of narrative logic which disrupts the audience's involvement with characters and plot is deployed in an aesthetic *tour de force* of blood and guts.

Furthermore, like *Psycho*, *Haute Tension* actually ends with a scene in a psychiatric hospital, explaining to the audience what just happened. Marie sits alone in a white room repeating the line, "I won't let anyone come between us anymore," while Alexia watches her from behind a two-way mirror. While not exactly the same, in that no doctor gives an elaborate explanation of his

[82] Matthias Hurst, "Subjectivity Unleashed: *Haute Tension*," in *European Nightmares : Horror Cinema in Europe since 1945* ed. Patricia Allmer, Emily Brick, and D. Huxley (London: Wallflower Press, 2012), 111.

diagnosis of the killer, the scene does point to the similar way in which Hitchcock's film plays with its audience's ability to identify with the character of Norman Bates after it's revealed he's been playing dress-up as Mother and knocking off pretty young ladies in their motel rooms.

The ending lends an air of incomprehensibility to its violence as well. The gratuitous murders which take place at the beginning of the film are revealed to be the work of Marie, and by extension the person with which we identify until the film's grueling finale. The random viciousness of the murders catches us off guard after the reveal because we did not see it coming. Even though the motive is explained to us somewhat, we respond with what is almost certainly the same sense of bewilderment seen in the eyes of Alexia's family as they had their lives taken away from them by a killer we had not yet deduced was familiar to us. While not directly referencing any imagery associated with terrorist attacks in the 2000s, *Haute Tension* successfully captures the fear of violent, unforeseen death while partaking in an everyday routine like inviting your daughter's friend over for the weekend or waking up and going to work in the morning.

Haute Tension creates distance between itself and the viewer in this way while remaining overwhelmingly violent and very much holding the attention of an assaulted viewer. In Robin Wood's evaluative use of "Art" and "Exploitation," it is evident that the issue of distance in *Haute Tension* and the visceral effect of the film's violence is at odds with the expectations of genre fans. Specifically in the area of aesthetics can we see the divide between the two generic categories as

one of class: Art defines "seriousness in aesthetic terms implying class superiority...Exploitation by denying seriousness altogether."[83] *Haute Tension*'s over-the-top violence somewhat discards seriousness, but the aesthetic acrobatic act it must undergo to do so (the film is elaborately edited together so that the ending, initially derided as a far-flung nonsensical trick, is on second glance actually built into a construction of subjectivity evident from the outset) is akin to the appreciation of the seriousness of art cinema.

Simply put, *Haute Tension* subverts the expectation of the slasher film by denying the possibility of spectator identification as it presents over-the-top explosions of gore and viscera, as well as in its subversion of character and plot traditions within the sub-genre. And while the unbridled explosion of violence in the film's climax may be expected by an audience familiar with the genre, as Hurst and others point out, it also calls attention to itself through its duration.[84] Though violence, and blood and guts in particular, are a hallmark of the slasher film, the sheer amount of bloodletting at the end of *Haute Tension* re-situates its audience into the grueling experience of the violence. "Aja's mastery, and the movie's sheer brutality and relentlessness, made *Haute Tension* an instance classic," writes Axelle Carolyn, confirming the film's style and content as central to its reception and success.[85]

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[83] Robin Wood, "Neglected Nightmares," in *The Horror Film Reader*, 114

[84] The entry for Haute Tension in 100 European Horror Films in the BFI Screen Guides series makes a point of highlighting the film's over-the-top violence explicitly: "It is clearly not meant to be taken too seriously." [*100 European Horror Films* ed. Steven Jay Schneider (London: British Film Institute, 2007), 105.]

[85] C. Waddell and A. Carolyn, *It Lives Again!: Horror Movies in the New Millennium* (Telos Pub., 2009), 66.

The aesthetics of modern American and French horror films as revisions of generic tropes are more visually transgressive than they are tonally, marking a divide between the splatter comedies of Sam Raimi and Peter Jackson and the exploitation film that relies heavily on blood and guts for its shocks and scares. As James Kendrick notes, "when horror violence is graphic...it transgresses polite cultural norms by exposing that which should be hidden, which threatens the proper social order."[86] The modern horror film utilizes gore in an overtly transgressive manner, brutalizing the spectator and asking how much can they take, how much are they willing to watch?

This returns us to the legacy of *Eyes Without a Face*, *Peeping Tom*, and *Psycho* within the horror genre. Each of those films asked its audience to endure its abject horrors at protracted length and in ways that transgressed the expected norms of their time, especially for their filmmakers. As I have articulated elsewhere, the duration and endurance of explicit and often brutal violence is a major component of the films which comprise the new extremism, and *Haute Tension* and other French and American horror films tap into this component as a method of provocation as well. Part of what is so disturbing about *Trouble Every Day*, for example, is its unflinching portrayal of abjection, up close and personal. The violence of the new extremism is suffocating. It highlights an affinity in the new horror film, which renders the abjection of the human body, even when expected as in a slasher film, once again horrific, away from the comfortable barriers set up by traditional bourgeois notions of the horror genre: as Wood

[86] Kendrick, *Film Violence : History, Ideology, Genre*, 86.

describes it, “laughter, contemptuous dismissal, the term ‘schlock,’ the phenomenon of the late-night horror show, the treatment of horror film as Camp.”[87]

These horror films, American and French, seem to share the same or similar audiences in the United States and in France. This is despite the new cycle of brutality and torture evident in many films. In fact, the influx of gore in American horror that began in 2001 with *House of 1000 Corpses* and continued through to the waning of the genre’s profits in 2007 coincides with a general popularity as evinced in box office numbers for the period. Even mainstream critical reception was positive on occasion, and several critics gave positive reviews to the new batch of horror films alongside their usual lamentations of their explicit brutality’s meaninglessness.[88]

For example, Kim Newman asserts that when audiences saw *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) or *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, “there was a sense that

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[87] Wood, “Neglected Nightmares,” 115.

[88] To illustrate that these films were often well-regarded by mainstream critics, I will use two reviews by Roger Ebert, who is very likely the most-recognized popular film critic in America. Ebert’s opinion of the 2003 *Texas Chainsaw* remake is indicative of many reviews which hated these new horror films, saying, “Those who defend it will have to dance through mental hoops of their own devising, defining its meanness and despair as ‘style’ or ‘vision’ or ‘a commentary on our world.’” (Roger Ebert, "The Texas Chainsaw Massacre," http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/the-texas-chainsaw-massacre-2003.) And yet, in 2005, he gives *The Devil’s Rejects* a positive review, opening by telling his readers, “Here is a gaudy vomitorium of a movie, violent, nauseating and really a pretty good example of its genre. If you are a hardened horror movie fan capable of appreciating skill and wit in the service of the deliberately disgusting, ‘The Devil's Rejects’ may exercise a certain strange charm.” ("The Devil's Rejects," http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/the-devils-rejects-2005.) That Ebert held such mixed opinions of films which could be viewed as extremely similar in terms of their brutality should give some indication as to the popularity of certain of these films by even their most frequent detractors, of which he most certainly was one, giving negative reviews to remakes of *The Hills Have Eyes*, *The Last House on the Left*, and so on.

these films were really 'about' Vietnam or social class in America."[89] His overall negative assessment of new horror just does not fit with his statement made sentences later that "the 'message' of 2000s horror is that Other People Are Shit."[90] For both assertions to be true, 1970s horror could only be about the era's politics and 2000s horror must be totally removed from the political climate in which it is produced. Are Other People somehow not Shit in 1970s exploitation horror films like *Last House on the Left* or *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*? The argument that one crop of extremely violent films engages with society while another is not is absurd at face value.

Essentially, Newman's negative reaction to a cycle of "torture porn" and more explicit remakes of 1970s horror indicates a blindness to the images an international audience is aware of - various Al Qaeda beheadings, the torture at Abu Ghraib - as well as to the cyclical nature of explicit violence in horror films. Images of torture and murder within the context of the War on Terror were widely publicized, reaching a global audience. Therefore, his reaction neglects the reason these films, at this time and featuring this content, were popular and resonated with their audiences.

The abduction and beheading of Daniel Pearl in February of 2002 was the first of many videos made available widely on the Internet which featured captive journalists, humanitarian workers and soldiers being tortured and killed by various terrorist organizations in protest of U.S. policies in the Middle East

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[89] Kim Newman, "Horror Will Eat Itself," *Sight & Sound* 19, no. 5 (2009)
[90] Ibid.

following the invasion of Afghanistan. In 2004, photographs of American soldiers torturing prisoners were leaked to the media and appeared on front pages of newspapers and heavily circulated online. That these photographs and videos were adopted by not only horror filmmakers but within a broader media context is perhaps self evident, but let us look at Eli Roth's *Hostel*, which directly references not only these images, but also the U.S. policy of rendition, in which suspected terrorists were abducted and subjected to torture at undisclosed locations.

Of the Abu Ghraib photographs, perhaps the most memorable and shocking is that of "the Hooded Man," Haj Ali al Qaisi, a prisoner with a black hood over his head, standing on a box, with electrical cables attached to his hands. The victims in *Hostel* are abducted and taken to a warehouse in Slovakia where they awake wearing a hood in a room filled with tools and weapons, and are soon joined by someone who has paid a lot of money for the pleasure of killing another human being. While this is no doubt the most direct referencing of the Abu Ghraib incident, we can see related imagery appear in many different horror films from the time, especially those which feature the torture of their characters as a major component. This includes not only the American remakes of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *The Last House on the Left*, both of which depict prolonged captivity and brutality toward the killers' victims (not to mention *Last House*'s use of retributive torture), but also the French films *Frontiere(s)*, *A L'intérieur*, and *Martyrs*.

For a critic of the films' worth like Newman, the assaultive in-your-face nature of the remakes diminishes the value of possible readings of the films, making whatever message they may be seen to have as foul as the people portrayed in them. The brutality of the films renders them an abjection even for devoted genre fans, and they are viewed as inherently worthless.

But if we take into account what has been written about the cyclical nature of genres, and about what purpose explicit gore might serve in horror films in relation to genre cycles, then we may see what this brutality in the 2000s provides for its audience. According to Thomas Schatz, "the genre's 'deeper' concern for certain basic cultural issues may remain intact, but to remain vital, its films must keep up with the audience's changing conception of these issues and with its growing familiarity with the genre."[91] The explicit use of blood and guts in the modern horror film serves both purposes. The issues at hand are different–Vietnam becomes the war on terror, social classes are more heavily divided–and the representation may be more extreme, but there is a clear reference to the films of the 1970s in the new brutality of American and French horror in the 2000s as the genre attempts to keep up with a changing culture and genre overfamiliarity following a half decade of supernatural films largely concerned with hauntings and bloodless scares, including *The Haunting* (Jan de Bont, 1999), *The Others* (Alejandro Amenábar, 2001), *The Ring* (Gore Verbinski, 2002), and *The Grudge* (Takashi Shimizu, 2004).

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[91] Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres : Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), 36.

Additionally, in James Kendrick's *Film Violence: History, Ideology, Genre*, he describes the controversy of explicit violence in the horror genre before concluding that "graphic horror violence has become one of the genre's central elements, beginning in the 1960s and reaching a mainstream apotheosis in the subgenre of so-called torture porn, which includes the *Saw* series, *The Devil's Rejects*, ...as well as the more graphic remakes of 1970s films."[92] As he notes, critic "Walter Kendrick argues that the increasingly explicit gore in horror films is not inherent to the genre, but is rather a means of refreshing it which makes sense in relation to torture porn given that these films followed a wave of significantly less violent, spiritually orientated horror films."[93]

In this sense, we might look at the gory set pieces of these horror films like musical numbers in classical Hollywood cinema. They are entirely spectacle, though they advance character or narrative in some minor way. And yet they serve no major narrative role. The information gained by the audience in visualizing the gore and arterial spray of these films could have been either implied or, as is certainly the case with the Hollywood musical, handled via a few lines of dialogue. We don't necessarily need Gene Kelly to perform "Gotta Dance" in *Singin' in the Rain* (Stanley Donen, 1954) - we all know what he's gotta do by that point in the film - but it becomes a major spectacle anyway, which informs our relationship with him as spectators and his role in the film. Showing Marie watch the killer slit the neck of Alexia's throat in gruesome detail while

[92] Kendrick, *Film Violence : History, Ideology, Genre*, 81.
[93] Ibid., 81.

hiding in a bedroom closet in Haute Tension serves much the same purpose, which is not very much.

The audience's familiarity with the 1970s films no doubt also plays a role in the increasingly explicit gore in the horror genre at this time, reinvigorating classics of the genre with new blood, literally, and stirring up interest in horror fans, whose familiarity with these films is often worn like a badge of honor. There is a "knowledge-induced appreciation of the genre and its violence" in the horror fan, who is excited by gory content not only because of a familiarity with the genre's lineage, but also with the effects work that goes into creating realistic gore. The audience for the horror film, though wide-ranging, is also a specialized one, familiar with the genre, its history as a site of social criticism, and the inner-workings of its production. Thus, we can speculate that the horror film is not any single thing to any one person, regardless of Kim Newman's insistence that the new crop of re-makes are inherently worthless objects.

Looking at the box office numbers of the two films we have been discussing, *The Devil's Rejects* and *Haute Tension*, there is a clear correlation between performance and gore content when compared to other types of horror, both in the United States and in France. Zombie's film, released for only a single week in France, grossed $205,000, and *Haute Tension*'s take over its two weeks in French theaters was approximately $700,000, with $545,000 in its first week. In the U.S. the numbers are higher, but the films also spent much more time in release, and benefitted from marketing and general popularity of the horror

genre, *The Devil's Rejects* taking in $17 million and *Haute Tension*, released in an English-dubbed version theatrically by distributor Lionsgate, grossing $3.6 million.

And while these numbers may seem to state that these films were not popular, general studies of box office intake and amount of gore in horror films released in the United States between 1998 and 2007 point to the overlap of audiences for multiple horror films in general:

> Horror film audiences...appear to be relatively loyal consumers, given that many subgenres earn a remarkably similar average amount at the box office. . .The fact that their [hillbilly/mutant slasher and zombie subgenres] box office performance and gore totals are nearly identical would indicate that the audiences for both of these subgenres are perhaps one and the same, with certain filmgoers habitually frequenting each of the two types of horror films.[94]

This assertion is also evident in the box office numbers for domestic horror films in France when compared to American horror. With rare exception - usually American films which do exceptionally well in the U.S. such as the first film in the *Saw* series or the *Dawn of the Dead* remake, or which are directed by French directors (*The Hills Have Eyes*, made by Aja, or *Gothika*, 2003, directed by Matthieu Kassovitz) - American horror films make less than $1 million in France, and the intake has declined as the popularity of brutal horror began to wane in the last few years of the decade.

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[94] Davis, Blair and Kial Natale, "'The Pound of Flesh Which I Demand': American Horror Cinema, Gore and the Box Office, 1998-2007" in *American Horror Film: The Genre at the Turn of the Millennium* 47-48

A perfect storm of events concerning the "torture porn" cycle in 2007 greatly and negatively affected the popularity of violent horror films. After negative publicity for Roland Joffe's *Captivity* and its marketing campaign, other films suffered. Eli Roth, the writer-director of Cabin Fever (2003) and the first two *Hostel* films, recounts the hostility to *Hostel Part Two*'s release in an interview published in *It Lives Again!*:

> Nobody knew what the first movie was [when it came out]; it wasn't a threat to people, it came out of nowhere...But then it got into the culture, it was this new wave of films and people had their knives out for me. A lot of people were bashing the sequel before it even came out. With the second one, the reviews became confessionals; they weren't even talking about the film, they were afraid that people would say they liked that sort of thing.[95]

Subsequently, *Hostel Part Two* did not do well at the box office, grossing less than its predecessors in both the U.S. and in France, and signaling the "end of [the explicit gore film's] cyclical popularity, and that horror was, once again, 'dead.'"[96] But that declaration was proven false by the success of *Saw IV* (Darren Lynn Bousman, 2007) later in the year, and by the critical praise within the genre press of *À l'intérieur*, which was released for only two weeks in France and was distributed direct-to-DVD in the United States.

Alexandre Bustillo and Julien Maury's *À l'intérieur* takes place almost entirely within a single house in the suburbs of Paris on Christmas Eve in 2005. In the middle of the night, a very pregnant Sarah is visited by a mysterious woman. After calling the cops, the woman disappears, and Sarah settles in for

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[95] Waddell and Carolyn, *It Lives Again!: Horror Movies in the New Millennium*, 148.
[96] Ibid., 150.

the night. Later, while Sarah is sleeping, the woman enters the house and attempts to cut Sarah's baby out of her stomach with a very large pair of scissors. The initial puncture of the bellybutton, blood streaming from the wound and Sarah waking up screaming sets in motion a ballet of viscera and carnage that reaches the fervor of *Grande Guignol*.

Utterly serious in tone and unrelenting in its brutality, *À l'intérieur* is one of the more interesting culminations of the horror film's increasingly explicit content in the 2000s. Throughout the decade there was a marked increase in the average gore levels in American horror.[97] And though there has yet to be a systematic study of French or European horror more generally in this area, it seems fair to say that *À l'intérieur* possibly stands at the extreme end of this spectrum, perhaps containing even more gore than the film in the number one spot from the U.S., *House of 1000 Corpses*. From the opening car crash in which the protagonist's husband dies to the final images of her eviscerated corpse on the stairs of her house, blood flows constantly on screen.

In scene after scene Sarah and the audience are subjected to explicit, brutal gore. This includes multiple stabbings (Sarah's mother in the neck with a sewing needle, her boss in the leg and then genitals with the scissors, a police officer–already dying from a head wound–in the side with a spear), blunt force trauma (Sarah in the head with a toaster), slashings (the boss's throat, Sarah's face with the scissors, her belly ripped open with scissors and bare hands), and even a burning (the woman, with an aerosol can and a lighter). That this brief

[97] Davis and Natale, "The Pound of Flesh Which I Demand."

cataloging of bodily destruction is incomplete should indicate how numbing in its constant presence the violence becomes, both removed from the idea of shock and exceeding generic expectation.

At the core of *À l'intérieur*, as its name implies, is the violation of space, the outward display of interiority, both domestic and bodily. The interior of the home is no more or less sacred or invulnerable than the body which we think is safe within it. As far as these elements are concerned, it is a film that operates within the bounds of the horror genre. The fear of invasion and the threat of the de-corporealized human body, the body broken down violently and as abjection, are standard in many horror narratives, though most often actualized in the slasher sub-genre, in which a stalker figure invades his victims' domestic spaces before murdering them. There are, of course, variations on emphasis within the horror genre.

In the haunted house film the intrusion on private, domestic space takes precedence. In the "torture porn" film, the destruction of the body is most prominent. The rape-revenge film also literalizes the invasiveness of the act of penetration. Films such as *The Last House on the Left* and *I Spit On Your Grave* share a common thread of interest with the sex-as-violence narratives of Catherine Breillat. In *Anatomie de l'enfer* (2007) for example, a man's erect penis dripping with menstrual blood takes on the phallic iconography of the knife in a slasher film; both penis and knife are key weapons in the rape-revenge film as well.

The violations of *À l'intérieur* lay somewhere between those of the slasher and the "torture porn" cycle. In the slasher, the de-corporealization of the human body is not tied to the narrative structure of the film itself. Instead, the threat of that dismemberment, of the abjection of one's body, is secondary to the victims' trial with her relentless attacker. The body's corporeal existence and the breaking down of that identity is not intrinsic to the film's plotting itself.

In contrast, a film like *Saw* or *Hostel*, both part of the "torture porn" cycle, has the breaking down of the body as its central focus. The victims in *Saw* are taught moral "lessons" by a sadistic genius who will destroy their bodies if they do not successfully escape the elaborate traps he has laid out for them. In *Hostel*, the victims are abducted and strapped to a chair, hooded and gagged, until their tormentors join them in a room filled with various instruments of torture, their bodies broken and bleeding (and showcasing special effects) as the focus of the film's minimal plot.

À l'intérieur's plot, in which Sarah must survive the onslaught of a ruthless killer, adheres to the basic structure of the slasher film, but with a twist. The violation of Sarah's body, the desire of her attacker to rip her baby out of her belly, is the sole reason that any other death or violence in the film happens. There are no moral reasons for Sarah to experience such an ordeal because she is a victim from scene one. And though a late development reveals that her attacker lost her baby in the accident seen at the beginning of the film, this only

serves to complicate how we feel about the actions taken by both the woman and Sarah. It certainly does not make Sarah into a character lacking in sympathy.

Instead, the attack's brutality and the constant string of death and bodily dismemberment that makes up much of the film are only underscored by this development. Perhaps Kim Newman at least got the "Other People Are Shit" portion of his argument correct, because the woman in *À l'intérieur* is certainly unjustified in her actions. And this being the case, what does it mean that the way in which de-corporealization functions in the plot structure itself differs from that of the "torture porn" films just enough to be considered a hybrid with the slasher film?

The body in *À l'intérieur* is abjected constantly, it is in fact the sole reason that anything happens in the film. All the incidental, emphatically gory death (and there is much throughout the film) only occurs because the woman shows up to kill Sarah and take her unborn child. The horror is two-fold here: the threat of bodily harm, and the random nature of death (the possibility that it is unrelated to anything the victims have done or will do). In this sense, *À l'intérieur* returns to the brutalization of the audience which raised the ire of British critics like Isabel Quigley upon viewing *Peeping Tom*. It also refers back to the ways in which Franju's *Eyes Without a Face* also skirted the line between horror and art when he exposed his audience to the bloody tissue beneath a woman's skin as a mad doctor removed her face, both confounding expectation and intentionally provoking a response of repulsion at the sight of it.

The responses to *Peeping Tom* and *Eyes Without a Face* put these films firmly in the realm of the "offensive film" as written about by Mikita Brottman. Brottman writes that "offensive films" represent a "disreputable substream of the horror/exploitation hybrid, which is usually taken to include a number of underground cult movies and what were once known as 'grindhouse' pictures."[98] While the reception of neither Powell's nor Franju's film was as extreme as that description of what an "offensive film" is, the films do correlate to that nature of the offensiveness, which is in the aesthetic displeasure and physical disgust they provoke in the viewer.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the moment in which the face of the victim is removed in *Eyes Without a Face* renders the body an abjection. Its explicitness is unexpected by the audience of the film. The body exists in a state of abjection for as long as it is on screen, unrecognizable. Brigid Cherry writes that "in art - or more specifically in horror film, depictions of these abject states or objects are central to audience responses in terms of disgust or the 'yuk' factor."[99]

The confrontational aspect of the imagery within horror can indeed render its violence in abject terms even to a hardened genre audience. In a chapter on Wes Craven's *Last House on the Left*, itself remade in 2009, Adam Lowenstein discusses the film's mainstream reception after a platform release which saw it play in atypical suburban markets. *Last House* received a positive review from Roger Ebert in the *Chicago Sun-Times*, but otherwise encountered near-constant

[98] Brottman, *Offensive Films*, 4.
[99] Cherry, *Horror* ,118.

derision from the press, including a negative review from the *New York Times*'s Howard Thompson, who walked out of his screening. Lowenstein writes, "Ironically, the audience of horror genre diehards that Thompson imagines enjoying the film often reproduces his own reaction to *Last House*, even years after its original release."[100]

For example, after pointing out that horror fanzine editor Chas. Balun finds the film "repugnant," Lowenstein further discusses the feeling of disgust provoked by the exploitation film.[101] Thompson's review is symptomatic of his need to reestablish himself within the bounds of respectable taste."[102] Taking the dissection of the pleasure of (being disgusted while) watching *Last House* further, Lowenstein returns to a later essay by Balun in which he attempts to reincorporate gory exploitation into the horror genre by explaining that it provokes "an examination of conscience" and a re-examination of the "moral universe."[103] Lowenstein rightly states that Balun's use of such terms "calls to mind...the traditional critical discourses of the art film."[104]

With this connection in mind, we might reconsider the state of the discussion surrounding the new extremism as an abjection of the art cinema. It is clear that the new extremism is intended to, and indeed does provoke a recuperative response similar to Balun's assertion of gore's place in the horror

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[100] Lowenstein, *Shocking Representation : Historical Trauma, National Cinema, and the Modern Horror Film*140.
[101] Ibid.,141.
[102] Ibid.,141.
[103] Quoted in Ibid., 141.
[104] Ibid., 142.

genre, just as over time critical discourse has come around to *Peeping Tom*, *Eyes Without a Face*, and *Psycho* as positive texts.

But the French horror film, including *À l'intérieur*, has no popular discourse. The discussion of French horror, unlike that of American "torture porn" and remakes, often takes place within online genre publications and blogs, and has produced a relatively small sampling of academic articles, comparatively.

The popular genre press reviews of *À l'intérieur* often comment upon its brutality as a central point of focus for the viewer. The website *Bloody Disgusting*'s official review remarks that *À l'intérieur* is "quite possibly the most violent, realistic, and bloody slasher film ever assembled," and also notes its return to the style of the "late '70s, early '80s."[105] *JoBlo.com*'s horror-devoted sister site *Arrow in the Head* calls it a "bitter and ferocious French horror vice grip," and the reviewer goes on to relate the film's viciousness to a couple of other prominent French horror films of the same period: *Frontiere(s)* and *Ils*.[106] In addition to remarking upon the film's all-out assault on its audience, reviewer Bryan White of *Cinema Suicide* writes, "It's...nice to know that I'm not too jaded to be shocked these days even by a scenario so well explored in American horror."[107]

All three reviews use adjectives to describe *À l'intérieur* that evoke the feelings of disgust the reviewers experienced while watching the film: for them it

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[105] MrDisgusting, "Inside (À L'intérieur) (V)," http://bloody-disgusting.com/film/110776/inside-lintrieur-v/.
[106] "Inside," http://www.joblo.com/horror-movies/reviews/inside.
[107] Bryan White, "By Comparison, Childbirth Will Be a Breeze, Lady. Inside Aka L'interieur," http://www.cinema-suicide.com/2008/05/13/by-comparison-childbirth-will-be-a-breeze-lady-inside-aka-linterieur/.

was violent, bitter, ferocious, shocking, realistic. The consensus also seems to be that the gore gets to be a bit much to handle, even for these reviewers who are seasoned genre veterans writing for genre-specific websites. It is also interesting that each of the reviews link the French films to various cycles of American horror, whether it is films of the 70s/80s (two reviewers make direct mention of John Carpenter's seminal *Halloween*), or the recent remake cycle in the U.S. The relationship between horror in the 1970s and the films under discussion here is in the nature of its political allegory,

Ben McCann's article on French horror and the penetration of borders personal and political, shows us that the violence in *À l'intérieur* is indicative of a trend in French horror that emerges alongside and after the riots in Muslim-dominated suburbs of Paris in 2005 and 2007. Images of the riots appear in *À l'intérieur* as Sarah watches television before bed. The protagonists of *Frontiere(s)* are running from the police after their own participation in the riots. In the latter film the racial aspect of the violence is highlighted as the fleeing teens find themselves at a chateau run by a murderous Nazi family. In *À l'intérieur* the physical trauma of the violence in 2005 is highlighted, the protests literally ripping the country apart from the inside.

On October 27, 2005, police were called to investigate a suspected break-in at a construction site, and thinking they were being chased by the police the boys had attempted to hide in an electrical substation. A local resident had called to report a break-in after seeing the boys walking past a construction site on their

way home from playing ball. Rioting began in November of 2005 after the electrocution of three of the boys (two died, one was injured) hiding in the substation, which caused a black-out in several nearby areas. Of course this was merely the triggering event. The BBC reported in 2005 that citizens of North African origin are systematically discriminated against in French secular society due to negative perceptions of Islam and that this discrimination could have been a factor which lead to the riots.[108]

In addition to the systematic discrimination against these citizens, there was also a series of revelations in the early 2000s concerning France's complicity in torture during the war in Algeria. Prior to that, Maurice Papon was convicted in 1998 for the deportation of French Jews during the Holocaust while under occupation forced the country to confront its own taboo past. Each of these revelations come home to roost in the violence of *À l'intérieur* and *Frontiere(s)*. In the former, as Ben McCann points out, Sarah's struggle to keep her insides intact is directly linked to the struggle of the Parisian government to keep France from bursting apart at the seams. In *Frontiere(s)* the past of the occupation is manifest in the Nazi family that lives on the French border in the middle of nowhere. They slaughter the Muslim teens who are using their farm as a hideout during the Parisian riots, and attempt to breed with one of them, Yasmine, because their own bloodline has become so grotesque and animalistic due to inbreeding that their offspring live in a system of underground chambers beneath the house.

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[108] "Ghettos Shackle French Muslims," http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4375910.stm.

The family of inbred Nazis is allegorically representative of the racism which exists below the veneer of the welcoming society France typically wants to project internationally. This family suggests that the Holocaust and the French involvement in it, however, is somehow interconnected to the racial bias the BBC points out may have led to the riots in 2005 and 2007. These riots were both caused by incidents involving the national police. Thus, they can be seen as a manifestation of enforcing a national policy which is well-known for requiring the carrying on of traditional French culture and language by law.

As previously mentioned, McCann's central reading of these films relies heavily on intricate knowledge of French national politics. Fair enough: the evidence is certainly there, and is fully supported. But the violence of a film like *À l'intérieur*, as noted in the genre site reviews, goes beyond that of other horror films. In the words of several reviewers it goes beyond *most* other horror films. It is so pervasive, so explicit, and so unrelentingly brutal that reviewers don't even know *how* to quantify or qualify it, and that fact moves us into a realm of discussion much larger than French national politics.

The brutality of *À l'intérieur*'s violence, like that of *Last House on the Left* and other horror films of the 1970s, trades in the common imagery of a very global sociopolitical environment. Substitute the images of the leaked Abu Ghraib photographs for any number of scenes in millennial horror films from the U.S. and Europe and one is likely to notice very little difference in affect. The confrontational aspect of these images in *À l'intérieur* and *Frontiere(s)* stems

directly from their direct transfer from the photographs and videos of real world horrors.

When Adam Lowenstein discusses the marketing campaign for *Last House* and its relationship to the photograph of Mary Vecchio taken during the Kent State massacre in 1972, he rightly demonstrates how horrific imagery of political violence can become personally terrifying. The body of the girl(s) in the photos - Mary and Mari (actually Phyllis in the movie) - is the site at which the trauma of the Vietnam era manifests, "the locus for anxieties concerning the nation as feminized and susceptible to violation..."[109] While I do not think it concerns our exploration specifically, it is worth pointing out that Ben McCann also points to Paris as a feminized entity, one open to penetrative and abortive attack, particularly in the traditional reference to the Parisian border as "*l'enceinte parisienne* - or "pregnant Parisian woman" - a protection against the invasion of the womb of the city.[110] This gendered violation, however, is largely absent in the international scope of these horror films. According to Kevin J. Wetmore, "the influence of 9/11...reshapes the gender politics [traditionally associated with slashers] and continues to empower women...but allows gender to be ignored as a concern."[111]

With his discussion of *Last House* and Kent State, Lowenstein also demonstrates how bodies themselves can be transferred from one medium to

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[109] Lowenstein, *Shocking Representation : Historical Trauma, National Cinema, and the Modern Horror Film*, 115.
[110] McCann, "Pierced Borders, Punctured Bodies: The Contemporary French Horror Film," 232.
[111] Kevin J. Wetmore, *Post-9/11 Horror in American Cinema* (New York: Continuum, 2012), 195.

another and retain the implied political violence against them. Mary Vecchio's horror in the Kent State photograph is one which illustrates a confrontation with the incomprehensible - an encounter with our own mortality at the hands of the government which is supposed to protect and serve us, its citizens. This encounter with the incomprehensible is also evident in the images of torture victims in *Saw* and *Hostel*. It is also found in the physical appearance of Otis in *The Devil's Rejects*, a lanky psychopath with a full beard and long hair, recalling images of both Charles Manson, whose specter haunts many 70s horror films, and Osama bin Laden, the evil incarnate enemy of the War on Terror.

Wetmore writes of the *Hostel* films, "The first film engages the fear of being tortured and the fear of torture in general. The second film engages the fear of becoming a torturer and the ambiguity of rendition, enhanced interrogation and the 'ticking bomb' justification for torture."[112] The dynamic change which is fundamental in the non-gendered "other" of millennial horror is particularly evident in *Hostel Part Two*, which follows not only the typical group of teens as they make their way through Eastern Europe partying, but also a couple of American businessmen who are paying a lot of money for the privilege of killing them and having their bodies disposed of so no one ever finds them.

Echoes of 9/11 abound in this narrative, and not just in the inability to recover victims' bodies which disappeared after their death as if they never existed. We can also see the legacy of American-backed business practices with ties to organization which may hinder progress in the Third World (such as the

[112] Ibid., 105.

IMF/World Bank) which were cited by Al Qaeda as one of the reasons for the attacks. Especially prevalent, however, are the images of Abu Ghraib's torture scandal and the practice of rendition which are co-opted as plot elements and aesthetic bases in both *Hostel* films.

As can be seen in many films of the new extremism, France's long history as a colonial presence, as well as confirmation of sins while occupying and under occupation, can and does manifest as largely multi-cultural casts- Algerians, Americans, Germans, Italians, etc. - which speak directly to the traumas of the national past. While it might be easy enough to show this as an interest chiefly of concern in the art cinema, with its globe-trotting narratives and explicit handling of international political situations, it is also very much a component of the French horror film.

In *À l'intérieur* the allegorical relationship to the riots in the suburbs are intrinsically tied to the ongoing global politics which crop up post-9/11. Especially by the third and fourth years of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan respectively, part of France's perceived discrimination against its Muslim citizens was fueled by the country's involvement in various military operations in the Middle East. Multiple news outlets at the time carried stories which, whether factually truthful or not, pointedly linked the riots to warnings of Islamist attacks across the world, and to the bombing of the subway in London earlier in 2005.[113]

[113] Conservative pundit Michelle Malkin's run-down of the riots makes explicit reference to the global war on terror on numerous occasions (Michelle Malkin, ""Paris Unrest" = Muslim Immigrant Gang Violence," http://michellemalkin.com/2005/11/04/paris-unrest-muslim-immigrant-gang-violence/.most thoroughly in). Author Richard Miniter has also voiced a clear linkage (again in

The barrage of violence which comprises the action of *À l'intérieur* is complicated by a reveal in the third act that informs the audience that Béatrice Dalle's vicious attacker lost her baby in the car crash that opens the film. She was the driver of the other car, now driven crazy by her loss and willing to do anything to recover what was taken from her. This revelation does a few things which will close out our discussion of French horror and its relationship to American horror in the 2000s.

First, it aligns the viewer with the killer in, if not sympathy, an understanding of the woman's rage. This realignment of viewer identification functions in much the same way it does in *Haute Tension* by creating a monster out of our alliances and then turning that monster loose on us. Again, this echoes Kevin J. Wetmore's assertion about the move of post-9/11 horror away from gendered concerns and toward an ambiguous us-as-Other double identification within the slasher narrative. This move allows the audience to identify with the Other in ways which do no adhere to traditionally gendered accounts of the slasher sub-genre.

If we take Ben McCann's allegorical reading of *À l'intérieur* (Sarah as Paris) of the suburban riots a step further, we can read the reveal of the woman's back story as those official policies of the French government which set the riots in motion long before the trigger event - the deaths of the Muslim youths - took place. The Parisian government is guilty of its own sins which give rise to its

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conservative American ideology) between the Parisian riots and the War on Terror (Pat Campbell, "Pc1170: Richard Miniter Stops by to Discuss the French Riots," http://pc540.blogspot.com/2005/11/richard-miniter-stops-by-to-discuss.html.).

monsters, whether those sins were intentional or not. The lack of intentionality only adds to the horror of a traumatic event when it comes back to us in the form of an attack. It is another level of our failure as human beings to understand the big picture beyond our own security and self-interest. That this is indicative of our humanity serves in films such as *Hostel* or *À l'intérieur* or *Saw* to remind us of our own squishiness and our own possible, and in any case eventual de-corporealization.

Second, by bringing the viciousness of sudden violent death - of the woman's miscarriage, of Sarah's husband, of the rest of the victims who show up at Sarah's house - full circle, the film narrativizes the no-holds-barred approach of the 9/11 attacks which is also evident to a lesser extent in the actions of the rioting groups in the Parisian suburbs of 2005 when they indiscriminately burned hundreds of cars and destroyed store fronts. In *À l'intérieur*'s final shots of Sarah's eviscerated corpse on the staircase and the woman staring at us in the darkness while cradling the stolen infant, we are denied the concept of justice we might encounter in more traditional plot structures. The triumph of the traditional villain, or in any case their continued existence, in so many of these films discomforts the audience, and the explosions of violence repulse them. Again, the specter of the War on Terror rears its head as an outgrowth of policies which led to 9/11, to the riots in 2005 in France, and to the bombing of the tube in London. We are denied the restoration of narrative order, just as during the time these films were produced, audiences were assured of no distinct end to our

social and political ills other than the possibility of our past transgressions would likely come back to destroy and/or kill us violently and with little warning.

By tracing the threads which connect a rather broad set of films within the generic boundaries of the horror film, I have shown how these films utilize a new aesthetics of brutality to represent bodies broken down. These bodies, eviscerated, torn and displayed outwardly in explicit fashion, are abjections which repulse and excite us. the millennial horror films of France and the United States are representative of our cultural anxieties at the turn of the millennium. They use the generic lineage of 1970s exploitation and slasher films and art film aesthetics of narrative manipulation to represent the political discourse of the global War on Terror and the political traumas of national histories return to public consciousness in spectacularly bloody fashion.

Conclusion

The explicit brutality of millennial French and American horror cinemas and in the French new extremism is ultimately the result of three factors. First, and perhaps most self-evident, is an increase in the abilities of filmmakers to show us this violence without having to cut away from it. The special effects industry's progress in this regard is absolutely essential, particularly the increased capabilities of CGI and its nearly full integration into creating not only photo-realistic creatures and environments previously unable to be constructed without the construction of massive sets and creative costuming, but also the simple creation of composites and edits, both of which make not cutting away possible.

The use of CGI in editing complex action sequences so that there is a continued sense of character in a specific environment is now *de rigeur*, and can be seen in a wide variety of films. The beating at the beginning of *Irreversible* is one such instance, but the action genre also contains many examples. In *Batman Begins* (Christopher Nolan, 2005) the eponymous vigilante hero glides through the air surrounded by digitally constructed bats as he escapes the police before landing on the ground. A behind the scenes feature on the DVD tells us this shot used a CG character models to make a seamless high fall possible, transitioning from a shot of the digital character directly into one of actor Christian Bale walking away from the exact spot, and the audience is unable to tell the

difference. 2006's *Children of Men* (Alfonso Cuarón) features an extended action sequence as a group of people comes under attack from a roaming band of looters in a post-apocalyptic environment which seems to play out in real time, but which is actually edited together digitally and features CGI components such as shattering glass within various shots which interact with the flesh and blood actors in the frame.

The ability to create gory special effects shots without the molding of elaborate prosthetics or ruining costumes with countless squib explosions when characters are shot has also become a ubiquitous use of CGI. The resurgence of Sylvester Stallone's career as a hardcore action hero illustrates this point particularly well. In *Rambo* (Sylvester Stallone, 2005), the fourth film in the series, Vietnam vet John Rambo's rescue mission to free captured missionaries in Myanmar eventually becomes an all-out bloodbath (as these things are wont to do), featuring not only countless CG bullet hits and exit wounds, but also machete wounds and disintegrating bodies caught in massive explosions. CGI is similarly used in the Stallone films *The Expendables* (Sylvester Stallone, 2010) and its sequel *The Expendables 2* (Simon West, 2012). All three of these films are arguably over-the-top, but nonetheless use computer generated gore to avoid extensive edits away from the action in the frame.

Second, as demonstrated in our discussion of *A L'intérieur*, the international political climate, rife with allegations and eventual confirmations of torture not only during the contemporary War on Terror, but also from past

conflicts in both the U.S. and France, provided a chance for an explicit allegorical representation of violence. A changing ethnographic climate, particularly an increase in Muslim populations in French cities, also contributed to the uneasiness of politics in the 2000s, with inequality perhaps more visible (and certainly vocalized violently in the various riots in the Parisian suburbs mid-decade) than previously.

Images of torture were and still are pervasive across a variety of films and television shows, including 2*4* (2001-2010), *Taken* (Pierre Morel, 2008), and *Hostel*. There are also representations of torture in films which dealt directly with the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq as well as the global War on Terror: *Green Zone* (Paul Greengrass, 2010), *Syriana* (Stephen Gaghan, 2005), and *Zero Dark Thirty* (Kathryn Bigelow, 2012). All of these films and TV shows have been criticized to varying degrees for their depictions of torture, and have even been shown to actually provide methods of torture to interrogators at CIA black sites and military detention centers like Abu Ghraib.[114]

This leads directly into the final and most overarching reason we can point to for an increased level of brutality and gore in the 2000s. A pervasive global image culture, thanks in large part to the development and widespread use of the internet, made the access to images of explicit violence readily accessible at any time, from anywhere. Online repositories for videos and photos such as LiveLeak.com, BestGore.com, and Rotten.com became hubs of activity for the

[114] David Danzig, "Countering the Jack Bauer Effect," in *Screening Torture : Media Representations of State Terror and Political Domination.*, ed. Michael Flynn and Fabiola F. Salek (New York: New York : Columbia University Press, 2012), 22-23.

sharing and viewing of death caught on video. An underground industry that formerly existed between self-duplicated VHS enthusiasts was transformed into a global operation with these sites, and nothing was hidden from whoever had the intestinal fortitude to type something into the sites' search boxes.

Sites like these lead to the widespread viewing of the Daniel Pearl beheading video, as well as functioned as easy access points to curious web hunters looking for the uncensored Abu Ghraib photographs. Beyond political scandals, videos of murders frequently turn up online, including the now-infamous "1 Lunatic 1 Ice Pick," which was shot by murderer Luka Magnotta as he first killed and then cut up the body of his victim, student Lin Jun, as well as vintage footage like the press conference suicide of Pennsylvania politician Budd Dwyer. Finally, we could see unlimited images of abject bodies, and we knew definitively what bodies looked like under duress and while being mutilated.

By adopting an aesthetics of extremism and aiming for realistic ultra-violence, millennial horror and the new extremism approximated the experience of being repulsed by such culturally abject material. This is no doubt why so many of these films were heavily criticized as pornographic and worthless, despite their affinities with similarly themed and aesthetically parallel exploitation horror and mondo films of the 1970s. Those earlier films were also criticized for their graphic content, though they now seem tame in comparison.

This sense that something was and, as I have demonstrated, *is* different between those films in the 1970s and those made in the 2000s, was palpable on

that evening in 2003 when I walked out of that screening of the *Texas Chainsaw* remake and my friend vowed she would never see another horror film in a theater. Even now, as neither the horror genre nor the art film is any longer concerned with blood and guts, these films are debated, criticized, and held up as bad objects. But if we look at them in context of their time of production, and within the lineages of various generic cycles and movements, we can see that they are useful when considered together.

The brutality of the new millennium's politics, admittedly not that different from governmental policies in the Vietnam era or the methods employed during the French-Algerian war, were tied up intrinsically to the proliferation of representation in media. The Internet was and continues to be a large contributor to the widespread knowledge of and access to violent acts undertaken in the name of political ideology. More broadly, access to the Internet has provided all of us with the possibility of encountering real, unfiltered abjection: images of murder, terrorism, and torture easily searchable and downloadable. Given this proliferation of content and access, it is easy to understand why the creators of films and other media may be interested in providing accurate representations of violence and abjection. The safe distance offered by fictional narratives in a world awash in such a surfeit of available real-life content may also help explain why we, the audience, are fascinated with these images even as they repulse us.

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