The Visceral Screen:
Between the Cinemas of John Cassavetes and David Cronenberg, a Barthesian Perspective

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ABSTRACT

THE VISCERAL SCREEN: BETWEEN THE CINEMAS OF JOHN CASSAVETES AND DAVID CRONENBERG, A BARTHESIAN PERSPECTIVE

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The thesis discusses two directors who are never considered together in academic discourse. Cassavetes' perceived focus on events led by the dynamics of performance and his looseness of technique opposes the calculated compositions of the Cronenberg film, with its aesthetic of horrific images and its gallery of emotionally detached protagonists. Yet it is between such opposing methods of cinematic expression that the ineffable qualities of film aesthetics can be discovered. Cassavetes' cinema achieves this by revelling in a surplus of activity that exceeds narrative, while the indescribable characteristics of the Cronenberg *oeuvre* is achieved through a systematic emptying of the image's meaning through a simultaneous commitment to paring back emotion and portraying of images that are controversial and inconceivable. Taken together, the thesis identifies these aspects of film as 'the visceral,' a facet of the moving image that most certainly exists, but is resolutely, and disturbingly resistant to interpretation.

Roland Barthes' writings are integral to a theory of the visceral. His re-evaluation of Saussurean semiology as a method of analyzing and undoing ideologically-imposed meanings informs readings of sequences from Cassavetes and Cronenberg's films. Following Barthes, the thesis suggests that the existence of the visceral is realized as a resistance to ideological interpretations of the image, and so cannot be described. Ultimately, the inability of semiology to fully grasp certain aspects of the filmed image is put forward as a rejoinder to theories of the fiction film as principally a narrative medium.

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and to what happens next.

INTRODUCTION

What does cinema do that language cannot? At root, this is the subject of my thesis. Using two directors who are radically different from each other in their methods and intents, the techniques employed here endeavour to ask questions of cinema that challenges readings of the medium that are centred on issues of narrative and cause-and-effect, alongside other forms of legibility read through consideration of the thrill of the spectacle. It extols the virtue of an aesthetic that defies understanding. In so doing it asks why the established language of cinema, and of the societal forces within which this language operates, is inadequate as a means of penetrating the essence of certain aspects of the filmed image. Along the way, it will discuss film in relation to other arts, in particular painting, sculpture and the video game.

CASSAVETES, CRONENBERG, BARTHES: A LITERATURE REVIEW

As is made explicit in the subtitle of *The Visceral Screen*, the focus of this thesis will be the films of two directors, John Cassavetes and David Cronenberg. Why, and how, these two filmmakers' works are seen to be visceral will be argued in the chapters to come. So too will the theories of Roland Barthes, whose writings suggest a method through which the films can be read. Together, these three individuals – two filmmakers and one theorist – come together to propose a definition of visceral cinema. To this end, the following literature review is intended as a way in to the most pertinent academic resources that support this thesis.

John Cassavetes

There is an enduring, heroic vision of John Cassavetes that permeates much of the writing about the director. Much of this stems from Cassavetes' own vociferous antagonism to the Hollywood system, a system that sustained his career as an actor,[1] just as it provided funding for his more personal projects. These projects are perceived as reactions to the more scripted, polished and audience-friendly products of the Hollywood studio. While suggestions that his films were entirely improvised (begun by the insertion of a written credit at the end of his first film, *Shadows* (1959)[2]) have been exposed as an oversimplification (King, 2004), the significance

of the director's work has been as a result of the interplay between the life of the man, his close friends and family and the films they make together away from studio interference.

Interest in Cassavetes is therefore in danger of being largely biographical in its consideration of the work. In large part this is attributable to the books written by Ray Carney (1985, 1994, 2000, 2001a). There is also the collection of interviews with Cassavetes compiled and edited by Carney (2001b), numerous academic articles and the author's website.[3] This collected prose attests to an image of the filmmaker that is inseparable from the life he leads. The films are therefore an allegory of the life and vice versa; and both are resistant to the rules of aesthetics and narrative coherence impinged by Hollywood's dominance. Carney extols the necessity for a biographical focus by reports from the productions themselves, and from watching the maverick at work (1994).[4] Affirmation of this approach to understanding the films through their methods is further encouraged by Ventura (2007), and implicitly by Cassavetes himself, who commissioned the author to write a day to day journal on the making of the director's last, fully independent film, *Love Streams* (1984). The shared testament of these biographically-inflected studies is that Cassavetes has no peer, certainly not in contemporary American cinema, while his artistic and philosophical influences are indicated – by Carney (1994) at least – as stemming from a North American tradition that harks back to the pragmatism of William James and the transcendentalism of R.W. Emerson.[5]

Cassavetes may then be regarded as outside the influence of a contemporary American cinema. However, within the biographical strain of Cassavetes studies, his relationship to cinema has congruence with certain European styles and movements, particularly French. Godard, Renoir and Rivette are cited frequently by Carney in particular as concerned with the same passion for exposing the magical trappings other films are intent on concealing. Crucially, however, these filmmakers, too, are not regarded as inspirations on Cassavetes, as their films contain a cerebral element that contradicts the energy and immediacy evident in the American director's projects (1994: 226, 294). This being so, Carney's conception of Cassavetes as equating with a European cinema at least highlights the importance of the director in French critical circles. Much has been written on the director there.[6] In some cases

the publications can be deemed as further verifying the importance of the director's life on his work, so that *John Cassavetes: Autoportraits* (1992), published by Cahiers du Cinema, details the personal aspects of film production through film stills and on set photographs. However, more important works of academic interest have been published in French on the Cassavetes *oeuvre*, including books by Gavron and Lenoir (1986) and Jousse (1989), on individual works, such as Brenez (1995) on *Shadows*, and as part of a wider critical thought, such as Mouellic's study on jazz and cinema (2000), and Amiel's comparative analysis of the films of Keaton, Bresson and Cassavetes (1998).[7]

These recent examples of French criticism are therefore able to posit Cassavetes within certain theoretical frameworks, moving beyond representations of the director as an iconoclast possessed by a unique approach to filmmaking. As a result there is now greater emphasis on what Kouvaros terms the "formal structures and tempos found in the films" in English language academic discourse, without recourse to words such as "intuitive" and "idiosyncratic" (2004: 23). Cassavetes' cinema is cited in literature that questions the perceived realism of the filmed image (Berliner, 1999), investigates aspects of male and female identity (Brenez, 2001; Le Cain, 2001), engages in performance studies debates (Brenez, 1998; Rassos, 2001; Robertson Wojcik, 2000) and suggests that the films may correspond to a nation's response to Watergate and the Vietnam War (Cook, 2002: 128-130).[8]

It is interesting to note, then, that the book-length studies of Cassavetes, while succeeding in placing him as a part of, rather than outside the history of North American filmmaking, retain Carney's insistence on the director's distinctive aesthetic, one that operates differently to that of any known contemporary. In this historical narrative, Cassavetes becomes a figure of the vanguard, inspiring others through his dogged resistance to the structures of the status quo. Charity (2001), for instance, includes in his critical biography of Cassavetes articles written by filmmakers who acknowledge a debt to the Cassavetes style (Pedro Almodovar, Gary Oldman, Jim Jarmusch); while Fine (2005) argues for Cassavetes as the progenitor of the independent North American film. In part, this attempt to situate Cassavetes as a touchstone for more recent directors may be offered as a counterpoint to the charges against the filmmaker by such figures as Kael (1971;

1974) and Thomson (2010), who find Cassavetes' pictures irrelevant, rambling and incoherent. Jacobs contextualises this resistance by agreeing that while Cassavetes may well be the inspiration for younger filmmakers, he achieves this status merely through his hostility towards established cinematic techniques, not as the inventor of new ones (1977).

In this academic environment, Cassavetes becomes either the iconoclast whose films are defined by their director's personal and professional antipathy towards Hollywood; or, his techniques become illustrative of scholastic agendas about gender, performance or politics. The first locks the director into debates over authorial intent and seeks to create an environment within which Cassavetes' cinema is classified according to its oppositional stance. The second selects the most pertinent aspects of the Cassavetes *oeuvre* to illustrate a wider theoretical point. Neither fully engages with the films themselves to discover how they relate to our understanding of cinema both as a theoretical model, and as practical experience.

Kouvaros, however, has noticed that there is such a disparity in serious examinations of Cassavetes' cinema. His *Where Does it Happen?* seeks to address how Cassavetes promotes an atmosphere of instability in his films, while suggesting the limitations of critical theory to address this instability. He finds throughout Carney's readings of Cassavetes, for instance, the admirable recognition that there are aspects of the films that disrupt analytical reasoning. Yet, in doing so, Carney proves unable to follow this argument through. He equips psychological motivations to characters who were hitherto denied "intentional depths" (Carney, 1994: 37; Kouvaros, 2004: 26) and attributes moral messages to a cinema that simultaneously is believed to evade "categorical judgments" (Carney, 1994: 112; Kouvaros, 2004: 27).[9]

Kouvaros, while focusing his book primarily on aspects of the physicality of performance in Cassavetes' cinema, does so through an acknowledgment of the rifts between what is perceived on screen and what is understood by the viewer without qualifying it via an explicit attempt at discovering meaning or resorting to biographical explanations. Kouvaros, therefore, is intent on explicating "the elusive heterogeneity of Cassavetes' treatment of human emotion" (116). Through Kouvaros, Cassavetes is no longer merely an idiosyncratic director, but one through whom certain critical assumptions about what film *should* do can be filtered and

analysed. It is for this reason Kouvaros' volume becomes a foundational resource for my readings of Cassavetes' cinema.

David Cronenberg

As with Cassavetes, the Canadian David Cronenberg's career as a filmmaker can be scrutinised through the lens of authorial intent. With a very few exceptions, however, Cronenberg's films are not read as inextricably entwined with his life.[10] Books of interviews with the director, as compiled by Rodley (1997)[11] and Grunberg (2005), are less concerned with the congruence between the professional and private than they are with the conditions of getting films made, and the artistic sources that inform them. Consequently, these books contain more questions about Cronenberg's interpretations of his own work, and how they reflect an overarching directorial 'vision.' Academic interest in Cronenberg follows this line of questioning, studying the merits and meanings of his films. A common approach to Cronenberg's cinema has been to examine it in psychoanalytical terms.

The formation of Cronenberg as a creator of films ripe for psychoanalytical study stems in part from his early commitment to certain tropes and stylistic trappings identified with the horror film. And as Carroll (1981) states, at the time of Cronenberg's earliest films, it is through psychoanalytic readings that the horror film has most assuredly been discussed by academics. Creed (1992; 1993: 43-58; 1998) finds in *Dead Ringers* (1988) *The Brood* (1979) and *Crash* (1996) abject horrors centred on post-Freudian interpretations of gender-relations. Beard (2006) in a thorough investigation of Cronenberg's career finds a consistent emphasis on neuroses, sadism (and sadomasochism) and questions of identity that exists in all the films, from *Stereo* (1969) to *Spider* (2002). Cronenberg's films are also the focus of articles appearing in journals such as *The Psychoanalytic Review* and *The Canadian Journal of Psychoanalysis*, so that works such as *Naked Lunch* (1992) and *Crash* become illustrative of certain approaches to clinical studies that have no direct link to film. (See for instance Levin, 2003; Malater, 2007.)

The continued framing of Cronenberg's films, associated as they are with the horror genre, in psychoanalytic terms contradicts what Rushton (2002) identifies as a reduction of this particular theoretical technique in discourses about film. This leads

Browning (2007) to question the validity of seeing Cronenberg as a director of horror films, particularly those that invite readings in which the figure of the monster destabilises the normality of life. In this way Browning moves the debate away from what Wood (1979) sees as the central tenet of the horror film – that the monster is the return of a repressed part of the individual or collective psyche – so that Cronenberg is liberated from his association with a particular aesthetic, chiefly that of the Gothic horror tradition in which narratives are framed around a binary opposition between the familiar and the monstrous. As Browning asserts, the characters in Cronenberg's films "largely accept and indeed embrace monstrous change and death as part of a process of evolutionary, biological change" (2007: 11).

This acceptance of the monstrous as part of the fabric of the self is extended to sociological readings that are rooted in psychoanalytic theories concerning the individual's place in society. Browning observes the absence of cultural artefacts and the prevalence of vague chronologies in Cronenberg's films, effectively removing his characters from a recognisable society against which they, and their actions, can be judged. Lowenstein (2005) moreover detects that the bodily mutations evident in films such as *Shivers* (1975) problematise the concepts of disease and health as antagonistic states of being. He suggests that socially-imposed oppositions of this kind are revealed as fabrications that are far from clear-cut.

In this way, Cronenberg emerges as a filmmaker who retains a complex relationship with the cultures in which his films are situated. Thus Browning explores the direct and indirect literary influences on Cronenberg's *oeuvre*. He discovers parallels between film and the novel that are a direct consequence of Cronenberg's adaptation of literary works, but also connections that are analogous. This emphasis on how Cronenberg adapts other works is also employed by Sinclair (2009) in his study of *Crash*. Lowenstein's observation that "Cronenberg muddies distinctions between private and public" allows readings of the films that place them in an uneasy relationship to certain types of cinema (the horror genre, the art film) and national identity (as Canadian productions that would traditionally be subsumed by Hollywood's dominance). Mathijs (2008) posits Cronenberg's cinema in the context of each film's production and the reception it receives from an international audience.[12] In addition, these three authors question, in one way or another, how

Cronenberg's films negotiate cinema's difficult relationship with the reality it purports to reproduce.

Both Lowenstein and Mathijs, in particular, recognise that the difficulties of representing reality in Cronenberg's cinema is bound up with the public image of the director himself in the culture of cinema. His is a recognisable presence as a cinematic 'author' (in interviews, and so on), but also as actor in his own and other people's films.[13] Nonetheless, his soft-spoken and reasoned arguments for even the most extreme images his films, and his cameos in *Videodrome* (1982), *The Fly* (1986) and *Crash* and others,[14] either in an unassuming disguise or merely as a voice, lay bare the impossibility of the filmed image to reveal the true nature of people, or of things. This is evident in Cronenberg's own words, expressing his aim for his films to "show the unshowable, to speak the unspeakable" (in Rodley, 1997: 43). The questions raised by these authors about the ability of Cronenberg's aesthetic to erase conventional interpretations of what images mean are the questions that underpin my readings of Cronenberg's films.

Roland Barthes

The emphasis on Roland Barthes as a theoretician who can bring together Cassavetes and Cronenberg's cinemas together suggests a method by which these two mismatched filmmakers can be seriously considered as equivalent. The 'Barthesian Perspective' that is the sub-heading of this thesis, while it affirms a particular method, does little to describe *which* of Barthes' theories are to be utilised. For, as Rabate (1997) identifies, there are at least two Roland Barthes. There is the Barthes who dissects the perceived truths of cultural artefacts; and the Barthes who is fascinated by the rapturous engagement between the reader and the text (whether this is literature, the photograph, theatre, music).[15] Culler (1983) goes further, locating throughout Barthes' career the literary historian and critic, the reflexive writer who further obscures his identity through the process of writing, the polemicist and defender of literary experiment.

More urgently, these many strands of Barthes' thinking do not appear to apply immediately to cinema. Rosenbaum's (1982/1983) admiration of Barthes, for instance, values the questions his criticism poses more than the answers. So, while

detailing the explicit connections between Barthes' analysis of culture and film,[16] Rosenbaum insists that the more rigorous theories – formulated by Barthes with literature in mind – are less easily applicable to film. Barthes' *S/Z* (1970), in offering a detailed examination of a story by Balzac does work, therefore, as a system for studying prose. Problems arise, however, when trying to translate Barthes' literary categories across to the inherently dissimilar structures of other media, especially film (as attempted by Lesage, 1976; Mayne, 1976; Welsch, 1978; Bordwell, 1979; see also Rosenbaum, 1982/1983). For Rosenbaum, the value of Barthes is in "the peculiarly *cinematic* flux, speed, and movement of his thought" (1982/1983: 52) so that even in discussions of other art forms and aspects of culture, his prose might seem to emulate the temporal motions and shifts achieved by film.[17] In this case, Rosenbaum finds equivalence in Barthes' critical aesthetic to the language of cinema, but not necessarily in the content of the criticism itself.

Barthes' peripheral relationship to film – borne out in his own admission that he is not a committed cinemagoer (as discussed with Delahaye and Rivette, 1963: 11) – has not deterred critics from reappraising his work in the years since his death in 1980 (and after Rosenbaum's article) in the light of cinema. Ray (2008), returning to *S/Z*, finds in Barthes' literary categories the desire to promote an active, as opposed to a passive approach to reading. It is in this support of active readership that Ray detects an approach that can be useful for the pedagogy of film, giving students the capacity to minutely analyse the cinematic text in ways that celebrate its plurality, rather than rehearse already established theories of what that text is 'about.' Lowenstein (2007) sees Barthes reinvigorated as a commentator on the era of the new media text, an era in which the multiple ways of viewing film equate with Barthes' notions of the viewer's power to endlessly interpret visual stimuli. More importantly, however, the viewer's response to the multiplicity of new media texts can be compared with Barthes' suggestion that analogue (pre-digital) visual artefacts are able to activate experiences and feelings that are inaccessible by any other means.

Lowenstein can be seen as part of a growing interest in a Barthesian approach to film that is concentrated on Barthes' final work, *Camera Lucida* (1981). A book about the ineffable power of photography, it has nonetheless found purchase in theories of

cinema, despite Barthes conceiving of photography and cinema as activating oppositional ways of interpreting the recorded image.[18] Elsewhere, for example, Lowenstein (2005) references the ineffable characteristics of the photograph in support of a thesis on the relationship between trauma, the horror genre and national cinemas. Rodowick (2007), reconceptualising the term 'cinema' in the digital age, calls on Barthes' observations on the photograph to position film both historically and philosophically as a medium in a time of change. Mulvey (2009) asserts that the connection between photography and film is contained in each medium's capacity to capture the concept of death. She uses Barthes' *Camera Lucida* to support this point. While not all of these authors will be explicitly used in the following chapters, their willingness to lure Barthes from his other (primarily literary) interests reveals his potential for film studies.

Authors such as Lowenstein, Rodowick and Mulvey, in attempting to free Barthes' thoughts on photography from the specificities of that medium, are engaging in an approach to a theory of photography that is evident in other disciplines. Fried (2005) for instance, discovers similarities between some of the observations in *Camera Lucida* and his own earlier comments on minimalist sculpture (in particular see Fried, 1968). At the very least, the suggestion of applying a Barthesian method that can migrate across artistic divides in an endeavour to understand aspects of culture is indicative of a desire to reach further into the aesthetic of the cinematic/digital/sculptural image. Also, and contemporary to Barthes' final writings on photography, Thompson (2004) applies the idea of an ineffable quality in the filmed image to sequences from Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible, Part 1*, after Barthes' (1977) analysis of a set of stills from the same film. It is from Thompson's observation of an element in cinema that exceeds meaning that my own discovery of an aesthetic dimension beyond understanding is developed. In this regard, Branigan's (2006) citation of Barthes and Thompson's affirmation of the "paradoxical, odd and indescribable" details of the recorded image runs parallel to my thinking (272).

Integral to Barthes' theories are his philosophical ideas about language. Barthes espouses semiology, an investigation into the "science of signs" (1968), as a means by which culture, cultural artefacts and (as in Thompson, above) aesthetic excess can

be understood. Adapted from the writings of Saussure (2009 [1915]), this theory of language analysis was reinstated by Barthes, most notably in *Mythologies* (2000 [1957]), as a means by which all aspects of culture could be understood. Therefore through Barthes, semiology evolved from a model that was most effective as a means of linguistic study. My indebtedness to Barthes (and to Saussure) in this regard is in their prioritising the arbitrariness of the relationship between the cultural object and how it is interpreted. This concept of arbitrariness between what is seen and what is understood underpins my own readings of how certain aspects of the image can be distinguished as resistant to meaning. As such, the sources that inspire and support my thesis (such as Thompson, Lowenstein and Ray) are filtered through this semiological Barthesian/Saussurean lens. Moreover, this adherence to semiology is by definition set at odds to certain other techniques of 'sign studies,' most notably the Peircean 'pragmatic' approach adopted by Deleuze to film (2005). Here, the capriciousness of the relationship between object and meaning is, at best, a secondary concern.[19] As Andrew (2005a) observes, the Deleuzean method supports "self-generating mathematical [...] systems" to investigate film (xii).[20] The Saussurean/Barthesian approach, by contrast, allows a greater flexibility between what is seen and what is read.

This being so, it is worth noting that scholars of Cassavetes and Cronenberg do refer to Barthes in the course of their analyses.[21] In Cassavetes' works, then, Kouvaros detects "a complex network of engagement" between the figure of the filmmaker, his films and the theory that binds them. It is this connection, Kouvaros suggests, which is reminiscent of Barthes' discussion of the relationship between the reader, the author and the text he writes (Kouvaros, 2004: xiii-xiv; Barthes, 1975). Rassos (2001) finds a photographic quality in some images from *Faces* (1968). Browning (2007), perhaps unsurprisingly in the light of Barthes' significance as a literary critic, applies Barthesian observations to the intertextual relationships between certain novels and Cronenberg's films (28, 52, 54).

In devoting a thesis to two directors viewed very much as the authors of their films, Barthes becomes a potentially antagonistic figure. His essay, "The Death of the Author" (1977) has consequently been analysed and critiqued outside of its original context as a work about literature,[22] so that Branigan (2006) sees it as an intentional

shift of power away from the intentions of the filmmaker towards the interpretation of the viewer (in the manner of Ray's pedagogic approach, mentioned above). Rombes, on the other hand, looking at the roots of Barthes' essay in the Avant-Garde journal *Aspen*, wonders if it should be taken so seriously as a manifesto, particularly since the proposed 'death' of the author would by extension include the systematic disavowal of essay's writer. It is not my intention to engage too thoroughly in debates over how much of the Cassavetes and Cronenberg film is 'owned' by them.[23] I am more interested instead in how the Cassavetes and Cronenberg film is regarded as indescribable through a Barthesian analysis of the film's formal properties.

In so doing, Barthes is cited not merely as a commentator on aesthetic form, but as a critic of how such forms can (and indeed, must) be used to undermine the establishment of certain attitudes and beliefs as entirely normal in our present society. Lowenstein, then, in writing of how Cronenberg's films "maintain that mythologies of the self and the nation have *never* been natural" (2005: 146) is indirectly quoting Barthes' concept of an ideologically-imposed structure ('myth'), which certain counter-cultural artefacts (in this case the Canadian director's work) are able to expose as entirely illusory. It is my belief that both Cronenberg and Cassavetes, as practitioners of a visceral cinema, are continually engaged in such acts of necessary, and dangerous, exposure.

GESTATION

Ideas for *The Visceral Screen* have evolved out of an academic curiosity into the limits of what film is capable of conveying.[24] Partly, this curiosity is part of a background in modern art history, aesthetic theories of which are grounded in how far paintings (for instance) are prepared to attempt verisimilitude through the application of paint on canvas, or veer towards total abtraction. As Western traditions in twentieth century art moved away from depiction and toward abstraction (in the cases of Picasso, Matisse, Mondrian, Miro in Europe; Rothko, Pollock, Newman, Gottlieb in America[25]) the ability to fully describe the content of a painting to a disinterested third party (that is, someone who has not seen the painting) becomes increasingly difficult.[26] Film's emergence as a medium that records and replicates everyday reality appears to counter painting's ability to

contain indescribable formal properties. In its most popular form – the narrative fiction – film is understandable; and the content of an individual film is able to be communicated to some greater degree to those people who have yet to see it. The modern painting, although it can be contextualised as an historical artefact, and in political or psychological terms, must be experienced firsthand. The narrative fiction film, in contrast, can have value judgements attributed to it *in absentia*, based on the arrangement of its formal properties and their juxtaposition over time as part of – and in service to – an overarching plot. The recognisability of film's visual properties creates an atmosphere of connectedness between it and the viewer.[27]

While there are films in which narrative is secondary, or in which narrative is subsumed by aesthetic concerns (and is therefore comparable in effect, if not in technique, to the modern painting)[28] I wondered if there are instances in which an ostensibly narrative film can possess (or, indeed, be possessed by) an alternative mode of discourse, one which resists easy interpretations.[29] Certainly in considering the films I return and am drawn to, what remains fresh about these films, as I perceived it, was retained within their aesthetic structures but hidden from me. Many of these films, I realised, were made by the two directors examined in this thesis: John Cassavetes and David Cronenberg.[30] Makers of films in a spoken language shared with Hollywood (English), and within roughly the same geographical area (North America) Cassavetes and Cronenberg could be regarded as 'insiders' with firsthand knowledge of the Hollywood tradition whose films nonetheless escape easy interpretation.[31] These two filmmakers offered neither wholly interpretable dramas nor entirely escapist fantasies, and it is through this refusal to offer satisfactory, soluble units of experience that the idea for the thesis began to take shape.

This view of two directors who continually draw me in to their films' aesthetics through their capacity to withhold meaning became a possible source for academic study through reading Barthes' interpretations of texts. It is through studies of his works – beginning with *Mythologies*, then *Camera Lucida*, the essential essays from *Image Music Text* and so on – that a method of enquiry into the aesthetic dimensions of the films is formed. His observation of an unknowable aspect of the text certainly corresponds with my own readings of the films. Yet he also indicates how this

hidden aspect of texts is not particularly welcome in cultures structured around order and meaning, which again is borne out in the continuing critical response to Cassavetes and Cronenberg's cinema as, respectively, unfocused and coldly transgressive. Thus this part of Barthes' project – to expose the ways in which texts undo established meaning – moves the motivation of the thesis beyond an analysis of forms. From Barthes, it uses aesthetic form to question how such forms create forces that effectively destabilise the established truths of cinema. In this way, the term 'visceral' surfaces as a means to describe both the hidden characteristics of the films and their perceived attempt to negate cinematic meaning.

VISCERAL

The term 'visceral' occurs in specific contexts to describe media texts. In a review of the film *Hard Candy* (David Slade, 2005) Williams (2006) notes that "male spectators' visceral disgust for some of the things" suffered by the character of Jeff will make it hard for them not to picture themselves in his predicament.[32] This is despite Jeff being a murderous paedophile (a term signalled by the film itself). Williams goes on to specify that for such viewers, "the castration scene is particularly intense" (56). [33] Of video games' immersive qualities, Poster (2007) writes that they are "particularly visceral media experiences":

> the graphics and sounds of contemporary games effectively make a
> seemingly detached and visual experience quite tangible. Physicality is
> established through many devices including point-of-view visual
> perspective, sounds (breathing, footsteps, punching, growls, explosions,
> etc.) and 'camera movements' that attempt to mirror bodily motion
> through gravity-bound space. (325)

Poster's equation of visceral influence with a particular "violence [...] that invokes cinematic processes" (325) places a particular emphasis on the immediacy and physicality of the experience. Certainly, the software company Visceral Games realises this definition in the science fiction shooter *Dead Space* (2008), which has the player controlling an engineer who has to survive being attacked by monsters as he treads the dark corridors of a mining vessel,[34] and *Dante's Inferno* (2009), which reconfigures the classic Italian poem *The Divine Comedy* as a bloody brawl through the Circles of Hell.[35]

Applied to such media texts, the adjective – *visceral* – is synonymous with certain relatable terms – 'violent,' 'hideous,' 'nasty'. In cinema, the word is fleshed out by remembrances of certain films and of tropes and incidents in certain films. Consequently, visceral cinema can be associated with specific genres: the thriller, the action film, and most readily, the horror movie. Alexander for instance, describes the "graphicness" and the choice of editing speeds in portraying the "violation" of the female body in rape-revenge dramas such as *Straw Dogs* (Sam Pekinpah, 1971) and *I Spit On Your Grave* (Meir Zarchi, 1978) as examples of the "visceral portrayal" of sexual violence (2005). Focusing on the image of the razor-blade slicing the eyeball in Bunuel's *Un chien andalou* (1929) Shaviro (1993) states that "in provoking visceral excitation, film hyperbolically aggravates vision, pushing it to an extreme point of implosion and self-annihilation" (53-54). He reminds the reader of Bunuel's assertation: "film's object is to provoke instinctive reactions of revulsion and attraction in the spectator" (54). This idea is extended by Williams (2004a) who sees in the horror film the inclination to evoke physical response, but also recognises this trait in pornography and the melodrama, each a genre connected by their low cultural status.[36] They all offer sensory rather than intellectual experiences, with their visceral effect easily located in explicit stimuli.

It is here that David Cronenberg's images most fluently express 'visceral portrayal.' His earliest horror features (such as *Shivers* (1975), *Rabid* (1977), *The Brood* (1979), *Scanners* (1981), *Videodrome* (1983)) reveal an attitude towards the graphic and disturbing sequence that necessitates showing it to the viewer. Once again, it is part of Cronenberg's philosophy: to "show the unshowable" (in Rodley, 1997: 43). Interpreted through the lens of a director who makes horror movies, this could be read as a shared philosophy with contemporaries such as Zarchi, mentioned earlier, as well as George Romero, Wes Craven, John Carpenter and to a lesser extent, John Landis[37]; alongside younger filmmakers such as Eli Roth, James Wan and Greg McLean.[38]

Even a film that enters the horror canon by association – such as Cronenberg's adaptation of a Stephen King novel, *The Dead Zone* (1983)[39] – conveying its horrors with minimal gore, does still contain what Rodley calls a "disgust factor" (1997: 118). In the film the central character, Johnny Smith, has the gift of second sight: he

'sees'[40] key events from the present, the past and the future of any person whom he physically touches. The film is structured as a series of episodes, so in one scenario Johnny is enlisted by a rural sheriff to help in capturing a serial killer. In touching the skin of the killer's most recent victim,[41] Johnny reveals the perpetrator is Dodd, the sheriff's deputy. Visiting Dodd's house, Johnny and the sheriff arrive too late: he has killed himself in what Mathijs suggests as "a meticulously prepared and chillingly executed suicide ritual." Importantly, and unusually for Cronenberg,[42] it is the ritual that is shown but not the suicide itself: "Dressed in a long rubber oil slicker, he plants a pair of scissors used to kill the girl upwards on the bathroom sink. He kneels in front of them, with his hands folded behind his head and his eyes and mouth wide open as in a trance" (2008: 115). The shot is cut before Dodd is seen to commit the act.

As Johnny and the sheriff find the body of Dodd in the bath tub, much of this short (twenty second) scene concentrates on the reaction shots of the two men at the sight of the corpse. However, there are here two brief shots of Dodd, the scissors protruding from his mouth (jammed, that is, "into the hard palate" (115)), each of less than three seconds in duration. The last of these shots shows Dodd's body twitching, *post mortem*. Here is the physicality of visceral experience conveyed through the image. As in other examples from the horror genre (and also the video game) the visceral stimulus is easily discovered as a specific aspect of the *mise-en-scene*.

Staying with this image, it is nonetheless worthwhile moving on to other interpretations of what feelings – particularly those responses deemed visceral – Dodd's corpse activates in the viewer. In his study of the horror film, Lowenstein (2005) describes the "visceral spectator affect" as being embedded in feelings of "terror, disgust, sympathy, sadness" (2). The image of Dodd in the bath tub is certainly able to activate these responses. Additionally, in the corpse's eyes being open, the viewer is forced to confront "the death's head," which "captures everything about history that, from the beginning, has been untimely, sorrowful, unsuccessful" (12).[43] For our purposes, Lowenstein accesses a further understanding of visceral cinema beyond its association with explicit, locatable stimuli. In this way, it is not simply that a rare, explicitly rendered and horrific sequence in *The Dead Zone* is

disgusting or even terrifying, but that it is so because it unlocks a definition of the living body that is inextricably bound to the figure of the corpse.[44]

Lowenstein here positions the aesthetic of the horror film in a very particular relationship with the traumatic historical period from which it erupts: "a shocking collision of film, spectator and history where registers of bodily space and historical time are disrupted, confronted and intertwined" (2). Here, the visceral affect of the film is contextualised, serving a very particular purpose. Similarly, Ott, on *V for Vendetta* (2006) argues that the film "enlists and mobilizes viewers at a visceral level to reject political apathy and to enact a democratic politics of resistance and revolt against any state that would seek to silence dissent" (2010: 40).[45] The visceral *purpose* of film, here, is to awaken revolutionary feelings in the viewer, or at the very least to stimulate awareness in the disjunct between basic human rights such as freedom of expression on the one hand and the potential for the political organisations of states and governments to suppress those freedoms on the other. A visceral response is thus entwined with one's instinctive understanding of societal rights and wrongs.

Once again, *The Dead Zone* can be understood in these politically-motivated, visceral terms. Mathijs (2008), indeed, places the film in the context of Reagan-era "paranoid anxiety" (117): in an event that informs the concluding episode of the narrative, Johnny 'sees' the future of America through clutching the hand of political candidate Greg Stillson. In this future, Stillson is President of the United States, and "in the name of biblical destiny" causes a nuclear war, a real threat that loomed very large in the 1980s.[46] Such an action confirms Stillson's villainy; although as the film makes clear, this is not the only contemporary "frame of reference". Stillson's words and actions (mostly behind closed doors) allow the film to tellingly comment on "political corruption, assassination attempts on politicians, sleaze politics, gung-ho conservatives" (121). Furthermore, when Johnny touches the hand of his psychiatrist, the Eastern European *émigré* Dr. Weizak, he does not 'see' the future, but the past, and a fleeting tale of invasion and violence. As the Nazis roll into Poland in 1939, the boy Weizak is separated from his parents. This collision of historical event and present crisis is another instance – after Lowenstein – of film stimulating a visceral affect in the viewer. In both these examples, *The Dead Zone* is

seen to operate as a text that has a greater contextual significance than is evident in purely narrative terms.

Here, then, are valid expressions of cinema's visceral affect. It is a moment of gut-wrenching empathy in the manner of *Hard Candy* and the video game. It is as an explicit visual device in the aesthetic of the horror movie, as in the cases of *Straw Dogs*, *I Spit on Your Grave* and *Un chien andalou*. It is, through the unequivocally politicised plot of *V for Vendetta*, an opportunity for character and narrative to engage the viewer with a particular, contemporary agenda. It is, finally, a method of dealing with the 'unspoken' consequences of historical trauma. These visceral affects certainly congregate in *The Dead Zone*, yet there is a further way in which the film may be seen as 'visceral' (as there is, I argue, in many of Cronenberg's works). Curiously, a preliminary definition of this example of a visceral affect can be found in the title of Cronenberg's film under discussion here; that is, on how we might interpret what is meant by the concept of the 'dead zone' itself.

For Mathijs the 'dead zone' is, as part of the film's narrative design, "a blank spot in [Johnny's] visions, which means he can alter the course of events" (2008: 116). Therefore, while he 'sees' Stillson initiating a nuclear attack as part of a possible future, Johnny can prevent this catastrophe from occurring by assassinating Stillson. In this way, the dead zone is an entirely interpretable facet, reasoned as part of Johnny's 'gift' and contextualised within the film's fiction. The dead zone is not actualised as a formal construct, but it is understood. The visions themselves can be perfectly rendered – the explosion of shells and the running of soldiers from Weizak's past; Stillson's bath robe and the technology of the hand scanner that will activate the warheads from a possible future – but the dead zone itself is merely a feeling, something to be explained through dialogue, exposition, or the readings of critics and academic commentators. There is no visual, purely cinematic way in which the dead zone can be communicated.

Of course, as the title of not only the film, but the novel on which the film is based, the importance of the dead zone is alluded to throughout King's prose. Interestingly, the sections of the novel that reveal what the dead zone is, do so either through rhetorical devices, or by suggesting that the blank spots in Johnny's visions are not so much subtle indicators of an unstable future, but of a current physical defect in his

brain's capacity to process data. Thus (in a scene not replicated in the film) an early trip to a fairground has Johnny explaining how he could predict the numbers on the Wheel of Fortune through metaphor: "it had the strangest goddam associations for me," he says, "Burning rubber. And cold. And ice. Black ice. Those things were in the back of my mind. God knows why" (King, 1998: 51-52). As the meaning of Johnny's dead zone is made more explicit, it becomes so through quasi-scientific, not supernaturally inflected language: "'It's like some of the signals don't conduct,' Johnny said. 'I can never get streets or addresses. Numbers are hard but sometimes they come'" (266). The novel's Dr. Weizak goes further, explaining this defect in pathological terms:

> A part of John Smith's brain has been damaged beyond repair – a very
> small part, but all parts of the brain may be vital. He calls this his 'dead
> zone', and there, apparently, a number of trace memories were stored.
> All these wiped-out memories seem to be part of a 'set' – that of street,
> road, and highway designations [...] This is a small but total aphasia
> which seems to include both language and visualisation skills. (180)

In the context of the novel, the theory of the 'dead zone' is closer to the ideas of visceral cinema I am proposing here, than is permitted in interpretations of the term in Cronenberg's adaptation. As in King's dead zone, my suggestion is that the visceral affect is an unreservedly physical (that is, aesthetic) aspect of the cinematic image. This visceral affect, then, is absolutely part of the spatial dynamic of the image, not merely a projected opportunity for creating an alternative narrative trajectory, for amending the written fates of certain characters, as in Cronenberg's version. Both King's 'dead zone' and the visceral affect therefore rely more on aesthetic representations in which certain meanings have been 'lost.' It is, somewhat ironically that, outside *The Dead Zone*'s conceptual understanding of the blank spots in Johnny's mind, much of Cronenberg's cinema also conveys an absence of meaning closer to King's definition. Thus, as well as being visceral in its function to disgust viewers through explicit images, Cronenberg's image is able to usher an unknowable element into the aesthetic which is no less disturbing.[47]

This definition of visceral affect as an aspect of the image that eludes meaning is found in Barthes. He suggests that there are circumstances in which cultural artefacts (including films) can be seen to convey "a hidden facet [...] indicative of a moment in time, no longer of a concept". He calls this facet "visceral" (2000 [1957]: 28). In

King's *The Dead Zone*, this hidden facet is revealed through Johnny's inability to process numbers or the specificity of place, such as a street address. In the greater Cronenberg *oeuvre*, the hidden facet emerges from the director's desire to "show the unshowable" (in Rodley, 1997: 43). Therefore Cronenberg's visceral affect is not simply achieved by engendering disgust through explicit imagery. Rather, there is contained in such imagery's inherent 'unshowability' something that cannot be expressed or comprehended through language. This capacity for the image to withhold meaning is expressed through the filmmaker's use of special make-up and mechanical effects to transform the human and animal body in such works as *Videodrome* (1983) and *The Fly* (1986). How *explicit* visceral images may also be attributed a *hidden* visceral quality is touched on by Mathijs (2008): "Beyond immediate shock value these shots offer a way into understanding Cronenberg's fascination for the accidental composition and contingency of the human body and how it is 'supposed' to look" (6). This echoes Lowenstein's assertion that the violently transformed body in Cronenberg's films forces the viewer to question the nature of the self's relationship to society, as well as physical identity (2005: 16, 146). In other words, the graphic imagery in Cronenberg's films disturbs because it rejects assumptions about what should, and should not be regarded as a 'natural' condition of the human form. The hidden facet of these images comes through the creation of something the viewer has not seen before, and consequently cannot describe.

HIDDEN

The temptation here, in suggesting that the visceral aspects of the image are hidden aspects, is to analyse the image using psychoanalytic method. Certainly, the idea of a hidden facet invokes Freud's theory of the uncanny, defined as "everything that ought to have remained […] secret and hidden but [has] come to light" (1990 [1919]: 345). For Freud, "the uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression" (368). In academic studies of the horror film – and by extension much of Cronenberg's work – this idea of the uncanny becomes a means by which the aesthetic is understood. Twitchell (1985), Creed (2005) and Beard (2006) for example, find that the themes of the horror film

provoke a response because they activate a long-buried, infant fear inherited from our ancestors, and bound up in the underlying fears of human sexuality. Thus in Cronenberg's *The Dead Zone* Dodd's suicide becomes a "hideous image of self-punishment that displaces, and replaces, the horrible pleasure of the sex murder: frightful sadistic violence supplanted by even more frightful masochistic violence" (Beard, 2006: 182).

These quests for meaning in the horror image are in keeping with definitions of the visceral affect which emphasise the genre's capacity for violence. They do not suggest an aesthetic analysis which prioritises the unreadability of certain aspects of the filmed image. In psychoanalytic theory, the the hidden aspects of the image are read as repressed desires to be unlocked by the horror aesthetic.[48] For this reason – and despite Cronenberg's work outside of strictly horror movie traditions[49] – the need to reinstate a reading of the Barthesian 'hidden' as not merely elusive, but actually resistant to meaning, necessitates a method that moves the debate beyond the confines of genre.

In this way Cassavetes emerges as a filmmaker who has few affiliations with the horror film.[50] His cinema is more concerned with the melodramatic conflicts that take place within certain urban and suburban familial settings. In this way they are more 'realistic' and everyday than Cronenberg's films. They have, as Charity (2001) and Kouvaros (2004) note, a more actor-centric aesthetic, with a greater use of hand-held camerawork and rough, out of focus images than can be found in Cronenberg's meticulously composed shots. Thus, working outside a genre whose images of violence and capacity for inducing fear temptingly attract psychoanalytic interpretation, Cassavetes can offer an alternative method of understanding visceral cinema as containing aspects that are 'hidden' from meaning. *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie* (1978), which opens with an abrupt cut from the monochrome company credit (Janus Films) to the saturated colour of club owner Cosmo Vitelli in a white jacket emerging from an enclosed doorway, offers an example of this hidden aspect of the image. The *mise-en-scene* of this pre-credits sequence suggests the character of the club – the luridly painted profile of a female breast, of a leg, of the words 'flesh' and 'girls' in giant, playful, yellow lettering – as the camera tracks right, and then left, as Cosmo paces the pavement outside, reflecting on the quietness

of the night. Cosmo, here, is a high contrast silhouette, the close-up of his face barely distinguishable even as the paintings behind him are vividly clear. This forty-two second opening shot is followed by a two-second shot, ostensibly from Cosmo's point of view, of a red truck speeding past, along the wide, dark, unpopulated avenue. Young men and women sit and stand in the open trailer as the camera pans in order to watch them. One of the men, in a black sleeveless T-shirt, calls out something which is indecipherable. Cosmo's reaction, in a final four-second shot, is to smile; his head inclined slightly downwards, and nod to himself. The camera, here, is at an oblique angle, giving a greater perspectival view of the exterior of the club.

Linking these three shots is the music, a heavily distorted Memphis soul riff performed on an electric cello,[51] which starts barely one second before the end of the first shot and continues over the credits that follow the third. While it is read as entirely non-diegetic, the music's appearance coincides with the untranslatable shout from the man in the truck. It could conceivably, therefore, be construed as emanating from the truck itself. Either way, the music becomes tied to the movement and occupants of the truck. The insistent bass of the electronic soundtrack lends a sinister edge to the sequence (amplified by the *noir*-silhouette of Cosmo himself and the loneliness of the location). As a result, an importance is attached to the truck. However, the truck and its occupants are not seen in the film again.

This sequence can be read as conveying a hidden facet akin to Barthes' visceral: the truck's placement in the *mise-en-scene* of *Chinese Bookie* – warranting its own shot, no less – is entirely non-conceptual: it does not add to, or create meaning, and it does not exist as a motif. Furthermore, while it creates an atmosphere, the suspense it engenders is unfulfilled in the remaining film, so that it is effectively 'shielded' from the pressures of making psychological or narrative sense. Here is illustrated the 'aphasia' (after King's novel) of Cassavetes' film. It is a section of the film that is certainly legible as an image, but is entirely unreadable as an intelligible addition to the narrative. We cannot 'speak' of what the section of the film means, only describe its appearance. It is a disorder of the aesthetic of the film, just as aphasia – in King's *The Dead Zone* – is a disorder derived from Johnny's physically damaged brain. Barthes, continuing his definition of the visceral artefact, writes that it is "invented, so to speak, on each occasion" (2000 [1957]: 28). The affect of the truck – as a

sinister vehicle, as a plot point that goes nowhere – is renewed on every viewing of *Chinese Bookie*: without a satisfactory, revelatory purpose, its meaning is hidden, and remains so.

In both Cassavetes and Cronenberg's cinema, then, the visceral aspects of the aesthetic can be defined precisely as this hidden, unidentifiable quality which is renewed for the viewer on each encounter with the film. However, as the following chapters will demonstrate, exactly how these filmmakers represent this hidden aspect is bound to the uniqueness of their techniques and the fictional worlds which they conjure for the viewer. The visceral as hidden aspect is therefore tied into the idea of the visceral as an endemic feature of the horror movie, so it becomes apparent why Cronenberg is an essential source of analysis here. Similarly, the perception of Cassavetes as an unfocused director – both in terms of method and aesthetic – is seen as an important aspect of this study. Pared down to their basic components however, each filmmaker's individual style is proposed as indicative of an oppositional philosophy. Cassavetes expands individual scenes to enormous lengths, so that essentially very simple stories will result in his films clocking up running times of over two hours. Cronenberg, on the other hand, outside of the explicitness of the gore, strips back everything in his films, from the emotions of his characters to the depiction of locations (helped by his consistent use of a 'distancing' wide-angle lens in his shots). I refer to these trends as, respectively, 'lists' and 'emptiness.' As they operate on these two poles – fullness on one side, austerity on the other – they succeed in hiding meaning. In other words, Cassavetes creates this visceral, hidden aspect by overloading the viewer – that is, the viewer's capacity for endurance and patience – with too much extraneous detail; and Cronenberg does so by not giving the viewer enough stimuli to empathise with the characters and their situations, even as he assaults them with horrific images.

THE VIEWER

The Visceral Screen is a work of theory. Within this locus the concentration on Cassavetes and Cronenberg engenders the response of the viewer to these directors' works. In this context the viewer is intended to be read very much as an imagined conception of a perceptive position as opposed to an actual embodied person.

Therefore the concept of a visceral response is proposed as part of the theoretical task at hand; this being the analysis of the film as text. As a Barthesian rather than a perception-based perspective, the aims of this thesis are to engage with theory first, in particular a theory that suggests there exists such a thing as an image with no meaning (as discussed in Barthes' *Camera Lucida* and "The Third Meaning"). The challenge, then, for the current enquiry is to ascertain what are the conditions in which a cinema of no meaning can exist, and what does this say about the culture that does not possess the adequate language to talk about such things. It emerges from a position in which the concept of viewer as part of a cultural/ideological attitude towards what films 'are' or 'should be' stands in for an actual invocation of the viewer as an individuated and physical entity. In this way it is far more concerned with how film can push the boundaries of the viewer's supposedly privileged perspective. As McQuillan (2011) notes, it is very much Barthes' overarching project to interrogate the cultural object in order to critique the limitations of culture, and it is in this spirit that *The Visceral Screen* is written.

Furthermore, the concept of viewer prioritises the visual over the aural aspects of film. This is not an oversight but a deliberate omission, since an investigation of the visceral properties of sound would expand this volume in ways that would move beyond the scope of the central thesis. First, space dictates that to discuss sound in these films more than it is already (as in the discussion of *Husbands* in Chapter 3, for example) would not be productive; offering a sketchy overview of its various levels of complexity at best. Second, and most pertinently, sound in the cinema is already perceived as having a 'visceral effect,' particularly with regard to music; so that the aural aspects of film has an ineffable quality that is already 'understood' (as discussed for example by Brown, 1994). The idea of the visceral here is to undermine assumptions that the recorded *image* (in particular with regard to Western conceptions of narrative cinema) must always mean something and be intelligible.

THE CHAPTERS: AN OVERVIEW

Barthes' identification of a visceral facet of the image as a hidden facet underlines the definition of the term offered here. However, as this is a 'Barthesian perspective' on visceral cinema, a firmer grasp on where and how Barthes locates the 'hidden'

aspects of the cultural artefact throughout his writings after this foundational statement in *Mythologies* is essential. In particular, it is integral to acknowledge here Barthes' use of semiology both as an instrument to disentangle the established meanings of particular cultural artefacts[52] and, more particularly, as a method that exposes the limitations of language as a means of understanding the 'hidden' aspects of certain texts. Indeed, Barthes' first use of the word 'visceral' in the context of *Mythologies* is in the context of semiology: what he calls the "visceral sign" (2000 [1957]: 28). In the following chapters, and pursuing this semiological tract, a lexicon of Barthesian terms will emerge. Consequently, the concept of a visceral aspect to the moving image as a part hidden from meaning will be explored via terms such as 'third meaning,' 'obtuse meaning' and '*punctum*.' These are words borrowed from Barthes and appropriated specifically to cinema, and more particularly the cinemas of Cassavetes and Cronenberg.

The first chapter, "The Visceral: from Adjective to Noun," begins to define such Barthesian concepts and notes how they might be applicable to an understanding of visceral cinema as containing meanings that are withheld from the viewer. In doing so it undertakes a more thorough analysis of how two film academics have adapted Barthes' theories to cinema. Robert B. Ray's *The ABCs of Classic Hollywood* (2008) offers close readings of film texts inspired by Barthes' *S/Z* (1970). Here, Barthes conceives of a 'writerly' approach to analysis in which the reader is more actively engaged in discovering the hidden meanings of a text by paying minute attention to every element. This is opposed to the more passive, 'readerly' method, in which the scholar only finds, and consequently perpetuates, certain well-established meanings in the text. This writerly technique is seen as a useful means by which visceral cinema can be examined, as it enables the viewer to get closer to the hidden, indescribable aspects of film without destroying its essential meaninglessness. While Ray does use this writerly approach to produce readerly results on occasions in his book, its applicability to the analysis of visceral cinema is still very important.

The same chapter looks at Kristin Thompson's "The Concept of Cinematic Excess" (2004), which uses Barthes' "The Third Meaning" (1977) as a template for examining how certain aspects of films break away from making sense. An integral conclusion Thompson comes to here is that these 'excessive' elements break away

from the narrative cohesiveness of the films. In this way Thompson's observation detects where a possible visceral element may inhabit. Nonetheless, as the chapter suggests, this is not the only way in which the visceral image may intervene. In doing so, the chapter refers to Barthes' concept of the 'third meaning' as an aesthetic property that can be located but not understood. However, in distinguishing visceral cinema from Thompson and Barthes' terms, the chapter proposes that visceral elements are not simply hidden aspects of the film that can be discovered if searched for by the viewer. Instead, they are entirely, and palpably locatable. In other words they are unavoidable, and encountered at each viewing.

Ultimately, this first chapter becomes a means of establishing Barthes' semiology as one method by which visceral cinema may be understood. Taken from Saussure's linguistic model, Barthes both broadens its range by applying its method to (potentially) all aspects of culture, and politicises it, using its methods to show how such cultural artefacts contain an inherent discrepancy between the objects themselves, and how they are perceived. Such perceptions are viewed through the filter of ideology. With this in mind, the chapter is suggesting that the reason why certain aspects of the filmed image cannot be read is because they resist our ideological assumptions about how films should mean. Finally, the chapter introduces the concept of 'the visceral,' transforming the status of the word from an adjective to a noun. In this way it becomes a term that is no longer concerned with cause and effect (or affect) but is instead regarded as a combination of a consequence and a facet of the image.

The second chapter, "Experiment" continues exploring Barthes' terms that are relevant to further understand this suggested term, the visceral. In doing so, it tentatively suggests the usefulness of Barthes' idea of the *punctum*. The additional caution in applying this concept to film is adopted because, while the *punctum* certainly proposes a philosophy of the recorded image, Barthes' application of the word (and he makes great pains to emphasise this fact) is specifically intended as a way of analysing the *still* photograph. Certainly, in approaching the *punctum* as a means of understanding the visceral aspects of the *moving* image, it offers an opportunity to explore divisions between Barthes' general approach to theory and this new theory of the visceral. More importantly, however, the idea of the *punctum*

– which Barthes sees as a means by which the quotidian aspects of the image are disrupted by an unfathomable detail – does suggest a way in which language may 'describe' the visceral. In particular, Barthes' prose is able to offer an understanding of the visceral as a hidden aspect of the image, as distinct from the idea of the visceral *affect* as a 'shock' that momentarily jars the viewer but is perfectly locatable within the frame of the film.

This chapter also explores some strands of filmmaking that are rejected as not adhering to the definition of the visceral posited here. The Hollywood film, for instance, is suggested as being too in control of its aesthetic, an idea advanced through the idea that Ray's writerly 'ABC' method (discussed in the first chapter) can only produce readerly results. On the other end of the scale, the avant-garde film, even at its most disturbing, is a formal process aimed at an intellectually aware audience. Cassavetes and Cronenberg's cinemas, then, are forwarded as operating somewhere in the ground between the self-discipline of Hollywood and the academic experiments of the avant-garde. Cassavetes and Cronenberg's *oeuvres* appeal neither exclusively to the mainstream nor the scholarly crowd.

To support this claim, the chapter continues by looking closer at these two *auteurs* and reflecting on why an *auteurist* study is most applicable to an understanding of the visceral in cinema. In doing so, it attempts to reconcile this approach with Barthes' famous proposal that the idea of the author as creator of the artwork needs to be overthrown. Partly, this antagonistic stance is posited as containing a not insignificantly ironic element, in the light of Rombes' research into the history of the article's publication (2005).[53] It does, however, also allow the chapter to examine the limitations and fallibilities of the author, even as he is seen as the sole creator of the work. The suitability of Cassavetes and Cronenberg as visceral *auteurs* is therefore suggested as being connected to how far they are willing to let the hidden, indecipherable aspects of the image in. How far, in other words, they are willing to allow the image to stand for itself, as it is, without the additional gloss of the Hollywood product or the intellectual *gravitas* of the avant-garde film.[54] After examining this sense of incompleteness through sequences in Cronenberg's *Videodrome* and Cassavetes' *Shadows*, the chapter ends with an apology: because it endeavours to undertake close readings of these filmmakers' texts, the thesis cannot

possibly cover every instance of the visceral in the films; it is itself incomplete as an appreciation of two entire bodies of work. Also, just as unfortunately, it cannot cover every film. Thus, because the study becomes an examination of only a cross section of these two cinemas, this means by necessity that certain films remain untouched here.[55]

The third chapter, "John Cassavetes and David Cronenberg: lists and emptiness" investigates the opposing characteristics of their respective works that allow them to escape meaning. Cassavetes' films, as the chapter restates, accesses a greater number of variables throughout their extended running times. These variables are, however, inconsequential and irrelevant. Cronenberg's, meanwhile, reduces the variables to the point where the aesthetic is bled of motivation. This tendency in each director's work is explored through an overview of the DVD releases of their works. In the case of Cassavetes, the messiness of his productions is visible by watching the film itself. Cronenberg's process of reaching a finished product is, on the other hand, discreetly packaged as the special feature on the disc.

A sequence from Cassavetes' *Husbands* is offered as a case study of how his films incorporate 'lists' into their aesthetics. Primarily, the idea of the list in this sequence is seen as potentially endless, particularly as nothing important is happening. In this way, the sequence tests the viewer's patience. As the chapter begins to define the reasons for this, it tackles the subject of realism in film, following Lowenstein's (2007) reappraisal of Barthes' thoughts on photography in *Camera Lucida*, and Bazin's 'realist' reflections on cinema (1967 and 2005). The chapter affirms these writers' observations that the camera's power is evident through its ability to reveal something of the world that the viewer has neither imagined nor seen. From this, the world of *Husbands* is revealed as one that exists outside of narrative sense, but it is also an impure expression of sentimentality, even as it continues beyond the point of the viewer's endurance. In other words, it reveals an aspect of the world the viewer wants to neither imagine nor see. Here, two literary terms are used to examine why the *Husbands* sequence so violently affects the viewer, even while it contains no violence. These terms are the subjunctive and the indicative. The first alludes to *Husbands*' seemingly limitless, and pointless, scene-setting. The second refers to the film's power to evoke a death-like atmosphere by transgressing acceptable

boundaries of taste and with it the unwelcome ability to provoke the destruction of meaning.

While Cassavetes overloads his films with pointlessly protracted sequences, Cronenberg strips back the meaningful content of his films. The chapter thus continues by exploring the emotionless aspects of Cronenberg's cinema. Using Barthes' observations from, and concerning, his *Empire of Signs* (1970) it traces the possibilities of a language that effectively empties meaning. Cronenberg's cinema does this, the chapter argues, by draining all dramatic impetus from his scenes. This emptiness, the section concludes, exists before an ideological interpretation of the scene can take hold.

At this more explicit avowal of what language can and cannot achieve in an effort to explain the image, the chapter states its reasoning behind adopting a Barthesian approach to semiology rather than a Peircean approach to semiotics. In particular it sets out to differentiate an approach to the visceral that prioritises the hidden, untranslatable aspects of the image from a purely aesthetic enquiry that sets out to classify every element. This latter technique is seen as integral to Deleuze's analysis of cinema, which has no interest in undoing or questioning the ideological foundations of how we read film.

The visceral, then, is a consequence of the arbitrariness that exists within the concept of the sign as proposed by Saussure and adopted by Barthes, where one side of the equation (the signifier: 'image') does not *have to* correspond with the other (the signified: 'meaning'). Here, Barthes' terms such as "filmic", alongside the "obtuse" and "third" meaning are further defined as accessing the territory in which meanings are eroded, incomplete or not able to be fully formed as intelligible constructs (1977; also Lowenstein, 2007). With this in mind, the chapter looks at the instances of spoken and written language in Cassavetes and Cronenberg's films that rupture meaning in significant ways. These include the incomplete sentences spoken by characters in *Husbands* and the 'runic' handwriting of the title character in Cronenberg's *Spider* (2002). In the case of Cassavetes, this manifests further evidence of the director's ability to evoke meaninglessness through a surfeit of activity. For Cronenberg, it allows an allusion to the paintings of Barnett Newman,

which, in the words of Rosenberg (1972) convey emptiness through a form of abstraction.

Finally, the chapter examines Metz's reflections on semiology and cinema (1974). Here, Metz conceives of the sequence of events on the screen as being particularly important, so his focus is on how the study of language can explain narrative cause and effect. This, then, gives the chapter a further opportunity to separate the concept of the visceral from the meanings advanced by narrative. If the progress of the narrative can be understood as a horizontal (or in Metz's terminology, a syntagmatic) line, the chapter concludes, then the visceral can be construed as a disruption of that line's causality and sense.

The fourth chapter, "Effects," gives an overview of Cassavetes and Cronenberg in the digital age. It discusses the use of special effects in cinema, noting their relative absence and occurrence, respectively, in each director's works. More importantly, however, it returns to Barthes' *Camera Lucida*, further engaging the idea of the *punctum* with the physicality of the pre-digital (that is, analogue) special effect. To do this, the chapter introduces Fried's reading of *Camera Lucida* and his earlier theories on sculpture in the modern age (2005 and 1967). Fried discusses how the presence of the modern sculpture has a theatrical quality that relies on the engagement of the viewer. It therefore does not do what the *punctum* does, appearing as it does through the accident of composition.

This sense of the accidental appearance of something not preordained is discussed in relation to Cassavetes and Cronenberg's visceral cinemas. The chapter hypothesises that the visceral appears in the cracks of these filmmakers' analogue images, suggesting that the progress of digital modes of production, after Cubitt (2004), offer a greater capacity of control over the filmmaking process. The chapter tests this by engaging in a close analysis of a special effect sequence from *Videodrome*, noting the inconsistency in textures and shapes in the analogue image from one shot to the next. This is argued as an instance of what Barthes calls "figuration," a condition of the image that exists outside of meaning. It is like the writerly text, the chapter continues, in that there is very little that can be said about it other than that it exists.

Examining a sequence from Cassavetes' *Love Streams*, the chapter finds that the viewer's relationship to a sequence in which a character drives a car is problematised by the camera always being in a position that separates the viewer from the fiction. Further, in noticing the similarity between one of these shots and the viewpoint of the player in the video game *Grand Theft Auto IV*, this analysis opens up the possibilities of discussing the visceral as it emerges in interactive digital media. The chapter argues that the potential of player control in the video game evokes Barthes' writerly approach to textual analysis. In looking at one such game, *The Path*, it discovers that such control also allows interactions within the play environment that are unforeseen by the developers. The chapter therefore concludes with the suggestion that the disruptive forces that undo the logic of the video game are parallel to those forces that undo the meanings of images in Cassavetes and Cronenberg's films. Importantly, it also suggests that the idea of the special effect is entirely oppositional to the visceral. The former operates a theatrical 'reaching out' to the viewer, attempting to grab his attention, while the latter 'pulls away' from him and his attempts to attribute meaning to it.

The final chapter, "Cities" explores the relationship of the Cassavetes and Cronenberg *oeuvres* to the urban environments in which they are set. Both directors film extensively in real locations. However, in keeping with the theme of the thesis, it is suggested that in depicting the city, their films actually invoke a sense of placelessness. To test this theory, the chapter studies key sequences from Cronenberg's *Eastern Promises* and Cassavetes' *Husbands*. Both these films are shot either partially, or entirely in the same location, London.[56]

Central to the examination of *Eastern Promises* is a degree of empirical research. Observing a brief segment of the film, the images of London depicted by Cronenberg are compared to their real-world counterparts, revealed in a series of photographs taken as part of my research. Cronenberg is seen here to empty the city of the meanings attributed to familiar, touristic landmarks found in other films. This is in spite of his cameras being placed in the heart of the city's most famous sites. The chapter asks if this obliteration of the city's 'face' is a cultural act of terrorism, with Barthes' definition of the term as it is applied to language as a suitable touchstone. Also, by bringing the two directors out into the real world, the chapter can more

readily engage with issues of ideology. More specifically, it can illustrate the ways in which ideology is threatened by the visceral meaninglessness of the filmed image. Therefore a thread that runs through the chapter is established by a brief analysis of two contemporary, and ideologically inflected, events: The 2010 student demonstration in the centre of London in which the Rolls Royce of HRH The Prince of Wales and his wife Camilla became embroiled; and the erection of Renzo Piano's 'The Shard' in the centre of the capital.

Cassavetes' depictions of London are viewed as a reappropriation of space. It is a trend that is traced back to his earliest film, *Shadows*, and is equated to the way in which the building-hopping *traceurs* in the extreme sport known as *parkour* (or free running) create a playground out of urban objects originally designed for a very different purpose. The directors are thus united by one city, even as their approaches to depicting it vary to radical degrees. As this thesis will conclude, however, it is in their differences that a thorough definition of the visceral can be understood.

The "Conclusion," then, suggests further ways in which a theory of the visceral might be appropriated beyond the focus elaborated in the chapters. Also included are three appendices. Appendix A describes the visceral's relationship to the viewer, to narrative and to spectacle as an illustrative model, and is therefore a further illustration of the *theory* of the visceral that is not intended – but may well inspire – an empirical testing of the ineffable characteristics of these films on an audience to ascertain how the visceral is received. Appendix B offers an annotated filmography of Cassavetes and Cronenberg's films discussed throughout the thesis, while also suggesting a few others that may be important but did not appear as examples in the main text. Appendix C is a glossary of terms formulated by Barthes and others with brief descriptions of how these ideas contribute to a theory of the visceral.

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[1] Cassavetes appeared as a major presence in mainstream Hollywood films such as *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) and *The Dirty Dozen* (1967). His breakthrough, however, came through television, starring as, among other roles, the titular private eye *Johnny Staccato* (1959)

[2] "The film you have just seen was an improvisation." Improvisation on the Cassavetes' set, it has since been discovered, occurs through the process of rehearsal and on-set happenstance, through which the script is written and re-written. Leary (2007) for instance, discusses the process of adapting a Cassavetes' stage play, *Love Streams*, into film. The stage adaptation featured a character, Jim the dog, played by Neil Bell, "who wore a dog costume and moved about on his hands

and feet." In the film, Jim is played by a real dog, except for in one sequence, when he is transformed into the naked Bell. Rosenbaum (2001) sees this as "yet another telling example of Cassavetes' existential method whereby existence precedes essence and presence becomes meaning: the fact that Bell was around essentially led to Cassavetes using him" (55-56; also Leary, 2007). In this sense, improvisation has a broader connotation than simply making things up for the camera. The process, then, has a greater capacity for flexibility during filming, but the structure – in the case of *Loved Streams*, an already existent play – is solidly in place

[3] <http://people.bu.edu/rcarney/cassavetes/> Accessed 9 January 2011

[4] In *The Films of John Cassavetes* the author records behind the scenes events observed during the making of *Shadows* (1959), *Faces* (1968), *Minnie and Moskowitz* (1971), *A Woman Under the Influence* (1974), *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie* (1976) and *Love Streams* (1984)

[5] James' rejection of "the redeeming or explaining interior" (Carney, 1994: 11) and Emerson's individualism evoke Carney's belief in the resistance to a deep explanation of the characters and their motivations in Cassavetes' films. The coda here is that while motivations may not be understood through a reading of the characters, they are understood through a reading of the actors and the conditions of performance within which those characters are contextualised as an expression of Cassavetes' filmmaking process. As Kouvaros points out, Carney does impose psychological motivation on Cassavetes' characters, but does so by arguing for "an overarching authorial consciousness [...] according to which the various aspects of Cassavetes' films can be comprehended and reconciled" (2004: 25-26)

[6] See, for example, Kouvaros on this (2004: 18-20)

[7] Alongside these, Gilles Deleuze's books on the philosophy of cinema must be mentioned, which illustrate the movements of space and time in film with occasional references to John Cassavetes' works.

[8] In the case of Brenez' articles translated into English, the more wide-ranging discussions of Cassavetes' works within particular contexts are migrated from their appearance in French academic discourse

[9] See also **note 5**, above

[10] The notable exception offers an interesting diversion into the act of creation as an expression of personal crisis. The physical horrors of *The Brood* (1979) evolved from Cronenberg's experience of divorce and the resultant battles over custody of his daughter. The manifestation of the characters' rage as cancerous growths that, in the case of the central protagonist's ex wife, mutate further into murderous children, instils the drama with anxieties seen to represent those caused by marital separation. According to Cronenberg, this makes *The Brood* a far more 'honest' film than the contemporary divorce drama *Kramer vs Kramer* (Robert Benton, 1979). See Rodley, 1997

[11] Rodley's *Cronenberg on Cronenberg* is published by Faber and Faber, which also publishes Carney's *Cassavetes on Cassavetes*

[12] In this way, Mathijs covers territory Beard (2006) regards as irrelevant to his study: "There is no detailed account of production circumstances, reception history, or 'career history' in general." Also, in making "no attempt to trace in any depth at all the origins or evolutionary development whereby

individual works came into existence," Beard is also not interested in the argument forwarded by Browning that the director's artistic influences are important (vii)

[13] In a beautiful montage of stills taken from the films in which Cronenberg appears as actor, Mathijs describes a trajectory of performances from *Into the Night* (John Landis, 1985) to *Jason X* (James Isaac, 2001), which taken together project "either murderous embodiment or bureaucratic disembodiment, often to reveal a combination of both" (Lowenstein, 2004; also Mathijs, 2008: 200). The implacability of the authorial presence in films is highlighted in the duality of the Cronenberg role

[14] Lowenstein describes the authorial presence, absent except as the voice of "Canadian bureaucracy" (an employee of an "auto pound") in *Crash* as a mirage, a disembodied voice belonging to a culturally-recognisable individual (2005: 170-171). Other such mirages are evident in *Videodrome*, in which Cronenberg's body 'sits in' for actor James Woods. In this sequence Cronenberg's face is obscured by a Virtual Reality helmet, which is donned (according to the director) not merely to give Cronenberg his 'Hitchcock moment,' but because his star was becoming paranoid about the motives of the crew. He did not want his senses obscured by the helmet. Woods' mistrust of everyone on the set (and Cronenberg in particular) stemmed from an empathy with the character he portrays, Max Renn, who is embroiled in a conspiracy plot. (This sequence is discussed in the director's commentary to the Criterion release of the film.) *The Fly* sees Cronenberg as a gynaecologist, behind a surgical mask. Being in the scene, the director says, was the most efficient way of directing it (according to the director's commentary on the 20th Century Fox/Cinema Reserve DVD release of the film)

[15] I deliberately omit cinema in this list to emphasise Barthes' perceived ambivalence to the medium. He is not, as Rosenbaum (1982/1983) notes, a cinephile. It is possible, at first glance, to see Barthes as deeply mistrustful of the hypnotic power of the cinematic image

[16] These range from Barthes' description and dissection of Mankiewicz's *Julius Caesar* (1953), the possibilities of politicisation of cinema after Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1932) to the immutability of Greta Garbo's face in the essay collection *Mythologies* (1957). Elsewhere he expresses his admiration for Bunuel in a 1963 interview with *Cahiers du cinema* and the book, *A Lover's Discourse* (1978). Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible Part 1* (1944), meanwhile, forms the basis for an avowal of the unfeasible properties of the movie still in *Image Music Text* (1977)

[17] This is a poetic reading of Barthes that Rosenbaum finds even in translation from the author's native French. In this way, in agreement with Rosenbaum, it is impossible to extricate the theory from the beauty of the prose

[18] In a famous line from *Camera Lucida*, Barthes states that he likes photography "in opposition" to cinema (1981: 3). This stance certainly suggests that the two media enjoy a largely binary relationship. Does it also suggest a preference? Is photography 'better' than film in Barthes' view? While his wording here does seem to value one above the other, it is also possible to interpret that what Barthes prefers is the opposition, not the ontology or capability of one medium over the other. Perhaps this question becomes increasingly irrelevant as Barthes' theories find a new voice in an era of new media, irrespective of their author's original intent

[19] I use the term 'semiology' to refer to the Saussurean/Barthesian model, and 'semiotics' to indicate the Peircean. In truth, Barthes used both terms interchangeably throughout his writings, even as he concentrated on the Saussurean approach. As Thompson (1981) notes, it is worth being wary of

how malleable words can be in Barthes' hands. (Thompson is referring to his insistence on using the term 'meaning' in his essay 'The Third Meaning,' even as he is applying it to texts that resist meaning.) As such, where I quote Barthes using the term 'semiotics,' it is worthwhile reading the word as 'semiology,' unless stated otherwise

[20] Andrew's critique of Deleuze is featured as part of his Foreword to the 2004 edition of Bazin's *What is Cinema?* Here, Andrew is contrasting Deleuze's mathematics with Bazin's "realist system." He concludes that, as "photographic reference serves as this system's first axiom [...] the theorist may derive corollaries and far-flung hypotheses" from it. This is particularly interesting in the light of certain revisionist readings of Bazin, such as Lowenstein's reconfiguration of Bazinian theory as being committed to surrealist modes of analysis much more than being simply a doggedly realist approach. Here, then, Bazin is moving even further away from the measurable formulae of Deleuze

[21] As does Deleuze, of course: in *Cinema 1* (2005), for instance, Cassavetes is mentioned in relation to the gestural properties of the film as motivating the accumulated movements of the aesthetic. Deleuze's brilliantly kinetic prose nonetheless posits a narrative trajectory here, in which the Cassavetes technique is entirely in keeping with the dynamism of emotions the characters express

[22] Barthes' references throughout this essay are chiefly literary authors: Mallarme, Balzac, Baudelaire. He also mentions Van Gogh and Tchaikovsky, but no filmmakers

[23] It is not that I do not believe this issue is important, but that I do not have the space here to engage in such debates, which are in danger of returning us to a biographical assessment of individual works. Also, the question of authorship becomes less a matter of how far the individual director is seen as responsible for the images he deploys, than how far he is willing to relinquish responsibility of these images. The visceral cinema is in this sense a matter of what the filmmaker allows to happen in his film, but is not directly responsible for this 'happening'

[24] As 'intents' go, this admission of what I find fascinating about cinematic form is not a far cry from Cubitt's first sentence in *The Cinema Effect* (2004): "I want to know what cinema does." In Cubitt's case, what cinema 'does' is "exist," and it is through the associative problems of marrying the existent properties of cinema's sound and image with the reality it has recorded that Cubitt has decided to examine this relationship via the special effect. While I, too, see many reasons to scrutinise special effects in the context of my thesis, it is interesting that Cubitt continues to concentrate on what film succeeds in doing, while I am more interested in the 'failures' of the medium to adequately render an interpretable message (1)

[25] The progress of these artists from painters of verisimilitudinous subjects to creators of abstract forms is fascinating to see. Rothko's earliest canvases, such as *Entrance to Subway* (1938, Collection of Kate Rothko Prizel) are highly 'descriptive' (and describable) in their depiction of recognisable forms. The development of the Rothko 'style' over the course of the following decade gradually removes the 'realistic' obstructions and creates a range of forms that are less easy to categorise. See Cohn, et al. (2001) for an illustration of this development in the artist's technique

[26] There is a distinctly Modernist positioning here, particularly the thoughts of Clement Greenberg, whose "Modernist Painting" (1965), in the words of Harrison and Wood (1999), "has come to typify the Modernist critical position in the visual arts" (754). Greenberg's separation of the Modernist painting from those of "the Old Masters" is precisely at this level of depiction: "Whereas one tends to see what is *in* an Old Master before seeing it as a picture, one sees a Modernist painting as a picture first" (1965: 756). The difference I would suggest between Greenberg's position and the idea

of a visceral cinema proposed here is that there remains a coolness to the Modernist approach (what Lowenstein calls "self-conscious distanciation" (2005: 4)) that is the precise opposite of what visceral cinema's revelation of constructedness achieves, which is an assault on the verities of cinematic verisimilitude. Visceral cinema may then be more akin to early reactions towards Modernist painting, such as the critical response to the work of the Fauves at the Salon d'Automne in 1905. See Ferrier, 1995

[27] Even in the new media age, digital technology aims for legibility more than abstraction, despite the capabilities of the technology to experiment much further. Early attempts at 'morphing' in films such as *Willow* (Ron Howard, 1988), in which the transformation of one creature into another is performed in one shot (in other words, without recourse to the 'cutaway' technique popularised in early films such as *The Wolfman* (George Waggner, 1941)) to the era of the digitally-mapped actor in films such as *The Lord of the Rings: the Two Towers* (Peter Jackson, 2001: see North (2008) and *Avatar* (James Cameron, 2009) create a spectacular alternative to recognisable forms, even as they use such recognisable forms as template for the spectacle.

New audiences, too, bombarded with faster cutting speeds and a more adventurous positioning of the camera in adjoining shots, are able to make sense of a film without being jarred by what once would be regarded as an inconsistency of shot duration and the spatial relationship of characters and objects from one shot to the next. Thompson and Bordwell (2003) maintain that the greater technical malleability available to filmmakers and the viewer's concomitant ability to make sense of the films made using this technology is merely an extension of the Classical Hollywood Style, which is essentially based on an editing schema that prioritises and references the fixed positioning of the viewer as a bystander or audience member (see also Bordwell and Thompson, 1997: 284-300). Nonetheless, this loosening of the Hollywood Style indicates that viewers are processing the images of cinema much more quickly. There are fewer mysteries available in the film's aesthetic – images are more legible: they can be read and understood.

[28] These are the Avant-Garde and experimental works, exemplified by the films of Stan Brakhage, Maya Deren and Jonas Mekas; comparable to similar works in other art media such as painting

[29] Here is a further connection to modern painting. De Kooning's canvases are in no doubt abstract, but one can easily discern that the formal properties of the composition suggest a continuation of the tradition of portraiture. See for example *Woman I* (1950-1952, Collection of Museum of Modern Art, New York). These compositions are still hardly describable beyond this observation, and so demand an experiential viewing as much as the paintings of Rothko or Pollock

[30] Some films more than others, which somewhat explains my doggedness in pursuing certain films over several chapters. For example, *Husbands* (1970) was my first Cassavetes film, and has haunted me since that first viewing. *Eastern Promises* (2007), meanwhile, I feel has pursued me, appearing as it has at the inception of my Ph.D. thesis.

There are, of course, other films that have had this hold over me: Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980); Roeg and Cammell's *Performance* (1970); Frank Perry's *The Swimmer* (1968); Polanski's *Dance of the Vampires/The Fearless Vampire Killers* (1967); and Fisher's *The Brides of Dracula* (1960). Within these films there is a tendency (in Lowenstein's words) towards an "allegorical" significance for sure (2005) – echoes of Vietnam in *The Swimmer*, for instance – but for my purposes, the dramatic interplay of text and subtext is only part of the appeal. There are hidden qualities to these films that remain undisclosed after the pleasures of the narrative have been depleted.

[31] Hollywood insiders: it is not simply that Cassavetes and Cronenberg share a continent with the Californian-based studios, or even – in the case of Cassavetes' *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie*, *Love Streams*, *Faces*, and so forth – the same city; they operate both inside and outside the studio system. Cassavetes' career as an actor (see **note 1**) was, initially at least, as part of the Hollywood elite. The homes featured in his Californian-set films belong to the Cassavetes and their families. *Faces* was nominated for Academy Awards (Best Actor in a Supporting Role: Seymour Cassel; Best Actress in a Supporting Role: Lynn Carlin; and Best Original Screenplay: John Cassavetes). In both Cassavetes and Cronenberg's cases, funding was achieved for several films from Hollywood sources: Columbia footed the bill for much of *Husbands* (see Charity (2001: 85-91) on how Cassavetes continued to secure funding for the project); Cronenberg's agent from 1980, Mike Marcus, was based Los Angeles, who introduced the director to a community of possible patrons there, including Carol Baum and Sydney Pollack. They offered Cronenberg the chance to direct the Stephen King adaptation, *The Dead Zone*, which the director completed in 1983 (see Rodley, 1997: 109)

[32] This thesis is not strictly psychoanalytic in focus, so its use of the word spectator is not intended to be read in such terms. In other words, the concept of spectatorship as it applies to a theory of the visceral should be interpreted as synonymous with words such as viewer, for instance.

[33] *Hardy Candy* turns the tables on the conventional stalker versus prey plots of the horror film (particular in its slasher format). Jeff befriends a fourteen-year-old girl, Hayley, in an internet chatroom. They agree to meet in a coffee shop, but when Hayley agrees to go back to Jeff's remotely situated house, rather than becoming the female victim to be sexually exploited by a male predator, Hayley drugs Jeff, ties him to a chair and tortures him. I would argue here that the visceral power of what is essentially a low-budget drama lies in the vengeful force of Hayley. As a resourceful and merciless presence, her ability to do anything to her chosen victim – who himself has no agency to fight back – offers a fearsome screen persona. However, at the point a motivation is established (Jeff really is a paedophile, he really did kill another girl who Hayley is avenging), even with the inclusion of the castration scene (which occurs mostly offscreen), the film's visceral power is neutered. Nonetheless, in a telling moment in which Hayley uncovers photographic evidence of Jeff's crimes, only she sees the photos. For reasons, naturally, of public decency and laws against child pornography, the viewer cannot know exactly what Jeff has done. In this way, the undisclosed photographic record of an extreme infraction echoes Basil Dearden's London-set *Victim* (1961), in which a married lawyer (played by Dirk Bogarde) is blackmailed over being engaged in a homosexual affair. The contents of the photo are never revealed, in accordance with Britain's anti-sodomy statute which was in place at the time. Here, then, is a hidden aspect of the image which can be construed as 'viscerral'

[34] Visceral Games uses the term "strategic dismemberment" to describe the process through which the engineer is to dispatch his enemies. Rather than going for 'headshots' (the standard approach to quickly killing an enemy in such games), the Necromorphs of *Dead Space* can most effectively be disposed off by removing their limbs with gunfire. See, for example, the trailer on <http://www.gametrailers.com/video/strategic-dismemberment-dead-space/35448> (Accessed: 10 February 2011)

[35] In a further move towards a definition of visceral experience as equivalent to the amount of violence evident in a media text, Visceral Games' commercial for *Dead Space 2* (2011) features a montage of older women's reactions to (unseen) footage of the game. One woman states, "This game is an atrocity." The (male) voiceover, accompanying sequences of game footage, announces, "It's revolting, it's violent, it's everything you love in a game. And your Mom's gonna hate it" (see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rSjL44d7WOQ> (Accessed: 10 February 2011))

[36] Williams inclusion of both horror and melodrama in her study of cinema that evokes a bodily response also serves to connect Cassavetes and Cronenberg in ways that unfortunately will not be discussed further her, but would make a fascinating follow-up investigation. Cronenberg's observations of certain traditions of the horror film are discussed in this chapter of course, yet we can also claim that Cassavetes' cinema is melodramatic in its purpose. Certainly Kouvaros (2004: 108-110) considers this with regard to *A Woman Under the Influence*, seeing a possible reading of the central character of Mabel as bearing "all the hallmarks of patriarchal oppression". Yet he soon rejects this hypothesis when he "attempts to understand Mabel's characteristics and predicament as the symptoms of an inner crisis." He continues, "Mabel's actions are figured not as an outcome of repression but as part of an extreme excitation of the filmic medium overall." As discussed in relation to other films here (in particular *Husbands* and *Love Streams*) the theatricality of Cassavetes cannot be linked to a melodramatic impetus (i.e. an emotional response to "cultural tensions").

[37] I mention Landis because he was part of a horror-themed discussion panel – alongside Cronenberg, Carpenter and hosted by Mick Garris – filmed in 1982 under the title, *Fear on Film*. Landis was, at the time, being lauded for the recently-released *An American Werewolf in London* (1981), a comedy-horror film containing the famous transformation scene from man to wolf, complete with in-camera mechanical effects detailing the stretching of human flesh and bones into lupine features. Beyond this, however, Landis is mostly known for comedies: he made *Kentucky Fried Movie* (1977), *Animal House* (1978) and *The Blues Brothers* (1980). His next major film after the *Fear on Film* interview would be *Trading Places* (1983). Interestingly, Cronenberg would be cast as an actor in Landis' *Into the Night* (1985), where he was introduced to Jeff Goldblum, who would star in Cronenberg's remake of the 1950s sci-fi/horror, *The Fly* (1986).

The other directors in this list are more comfortably labelled as horror filmmakers. Romero made the seminal *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) and *Dawn of the Dead* (1978); Craven *The Last House on the Left* (1972) and *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977); Carpenter *Halloween* (1978) and *The Fog* (1980). He also, of course, made the *Elvis* biopic for TV (1979)

[38] Eli Roth made the *Hostel* films (2005 and 2007); Wan *Saw* (2004) and McLean *Wolf Creek* (2004)

[39] See also Browning (2009) on Cronenberg's adaptation of King's novel

[40] 'Sees': Mathijs, too, places inverted commas around the word in his description of Johnny's visions (2008: 115-121). Such a necessity – which singles out the separateness of the event – succeeds in bracketing off the visionary event as something that occurs outside conventional sight. Such an observation (!) can be distinguished as representing something of what my definition of visceral cinema attempts: what is 'seen,' but not seen

[41] The victim is a young woman, and in the process of touching her body, Johnny tears open her coat, revealing her breasts – a moment of explicitness in an otherwise restrained drama reminiscent of certain trends in exploitation cinema

[42] Unusual, for sure, that Cronenberg does not stay with Dodd in this sequence. Evidence of Cronenberg's insistence on staying with the action, even when that action is extremely disturbing, is overwhelming, such as the exploding head in *Scanners*, or the gouging of the eye in *Eastern Promises* (2007)

[43] Lowenstein's interpretation of the 'death's head' is taken from Walter Benjamin's *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928). Viewed as an "allegorical sign" the death's head opposes Romanticism's notion of "idealised beauty"

[44] As Lowenstein has it, "the body must be defined in terms of the corpse" (2005: 146). As an allegorical instrument, the death's head is used by Lowenstein to access certain aspects of national trauma through the 'body' of the horror film

[45] Plot: based on Alan Moore's graphic novel, *V for Vendetta*'s mysterious, masked protagonist, 'V', takes on the role of revolutionary/terrorist, conspiring to plant a bomb on the London Underground in an effort to strike a blow against the ruling classes in this future-dystopian vision of England. While the source of Moore's anti-hero is undoubtedly Guy Fawkes and the infamous 'Gunpowder Plot,' the planned release of the filmed version coincided with the real bombings of the London transport network – both Underground and bus services – of July 2005. In this way, *V for Vendetta* was certainly prescient, but the character of 'V' sits uncomfortably as a historical figure of resistance in the age of the suicide bomber

[46] As Mathijs states, this "was very close to reality in the 1980s (and still is)" (2008: 121)

[47] In fact, Cronenberg's *The Dead Zone* actually provides a perfect illustration of the blank spot as found in King's novel. The opening credits of the film appear over images of the rural townscape that will provide the backdrop of the film. Subtly at first, a collage of black shapes fades in over these images, which eventually define, in outline, the title of the movie. Mostly appearing at the corner of the screen (a right-angled cut out to describe the upper left edge of the letter 'Z', for instance) they are hardly noticeable. When a large black circle materialises and blanks out a significant portion of the screen (it is the centre of the 'O' in *Zone*) it becomes a major agent that disrupts the idyllic scenes behind it. This void in the 'legibility' of the *mise-en-scene* becomes brilliantly equivalent to Johnny's memory-loss, a blank in the image's ability to convey visual data, and meaning. It is a disturbing moment, effectively negating the perceived immediacy and sense of the filmed image

[48] There are aspects of Freud's theory of the uncanny, as applied to film, that do gel with certain interpretations of visceral cinema as resistant to meaning. Wood (1979) for instance, states: "One might say that the true subject of the horror genre is all that our civilisation represses or oppresses" (10). Here, Wood finds the same tensions between representation and its relationship to society as is evident in my Barthesian view of visceral cinema. The difference is a matter of degree: between what is possible to interpret, and what lies beyond the scope of (psychoanalytical) reasoning

[49] Most explicitly, the drag racing movie *Fast Company* (1979), which, as Mathijs states, is not a horror film in any visible sense. It instead focuses on Cronenberg's fascination for the speed of motor vehicles and motorised travel (2008: 53-71)

[50] There are *some* connections. The possibility of a supernatural event in the guise of a dead fan who haunts the theatre actress Myrtle Gordon in *Opening Night* (1977) and the *séance* conducted to lay her to rest. Cassavetes was, in addition, an actor in other director's horror films. As Rosemary's husband, who makes a deal with his devil-worshipping neighbours in *Rosemary's Baby* (Roman Polanski, 1968); as the doctor investigating occult practices in *Incubus* (John Hough, 1981) ; and as the evil autocrat in *The Fury* (Brian DePalma, 1978) a role that has him blown apart by psychic forces in a manner that predicts Cronenberg's famous exploding head effect in *Scanners* (1981)

[51] Composed by Bo Harwood, the music is possibly based on Booker T. And the M.G.'s "Green Onions" from 1962

[52] As he does in *Mythologies* in analyses of French cuisine, children's toys, the theatrical tropes of the world of wrestling, election photographs and the manipulation of the *mise-en-scene* in Mankiewicz's *Julius Caesar*, among others

[53] See the chapter for full details. Essentially, Barthes' "The Death of the Author" first appeared in the avant-garde journal *Aspen*, known – according to Rombes – for its ironically-inflected intellectual content

[54] The idea of 'gloss' has a certain additional meaning here. The lack of completeness in Cassavetes and Cronenberg's cinemas echoes the movement from representational to abstract (that is, Modernist) forms of representation in painting. As Greenberg (1965) and Harrison and Wood (1999), among others, have noted, Modernist painting disavowed 'completeness' not only through a move away from representation but also through the omission of glazing over the painted surface of the canvas. In this way, at the moment of hanging in the art museum, the abstract painting is only complete in the sense that the artist has handed it over to a new owner. Without the glazing that seals the painting from being worked on further, the painting is only *potentially* complete. Non-representational and open to additional applications of pigment, we could argue it is never properly 'finished.' It is interesting to note that the idea of Classicism in art, with its sense of completeness and representation, does appear to correspond with the Classical Hollywood model of meaning, and of narrative

Of course, as with the example of avant-garde cinema discussed in this thesis, avant-garde paintings also differ from our understanding of Cassavetes and Cronenberg as visceral filmmakers. These paintings, again, as with their cinematic counterparts are understood, intellectually as significant, particularly in the context of the modern art museum. (And of course, avant-garde artists such as Fernand Leger have made the crossing from painting to cinema, from, for example, *Element Mecanique* (1924) to *Ballet Mecanique* (1924))

[55] Appendix B goes some way to rectifying the omissions, yet certain key films (Cassavetes' *Opening Night*, Cronenberg's *A History of Violence*) remain untouched

[56] *Husbands*, in fact, is located partly in New York, and partly in London. On a whim, the three suburban forty-somethings fly from the US to England. It is a facet of Cassavetes' style that neither location is sufficiently or aesthetically evoked, yet both are curiously, mysteriously distinct

CHAPTER ONE

THE VISCERAL: FROM ADJECTIVE TO NOUN

In the introductory chapter, films such as *Straw Dogs*, *I Spit on Your Grave*, *Un chien andalou* and *V for Vendetta* were discussed as having a visceral affect based very much on their explicit content. They are violent films, or they are films that awaken long-dormant political feelings, or both. In each of these cases the relationship of the film to its visceral affect is in the service to an agenda. The point here is that in each of these examples, the visceral effect – that is, the reaction of the viewer – has a visceral cause that is firmly established in the construct of the film itself. The editing in *Straw Dogs* and *I Spit on Your Grave*'s rape sequences and the explicitly rendered *mise-en-scene* of *Un chien andalou* create visual motivation for viewer response; while the addition of an unequivocally politicised plot in *V for Vendetta* allows viewer empathy and emotion to be stirred by engagement with character and narrative.

While these are valid expressions of how visceral cause and visceral effect are exploited by cinematic devices such as through the manipulations of editing, *mise-en-scene*, plot, and so forth,[1] the understanding of what constitutes a visceral element in film for *The Visceral Screen* carves out a territory that is far less explicitly locatable through categories such as 'genre' or 'narrative,' or even by techniques – the cut, the shot; though it may certainly be regarded as working in parallel to our understanding of visceral experience as a mostly physical sensation. These visceral elements, in other words, are not defined by what is apprehended, but by what is hidden from the sight of the viewer. The visceral screen *screens* what is unable to be fully comprehended by the viewer's logical, sensory faculties (primarily the eyes) but is nonetheless undeniably present as an aspect of the filmed image. In this way the word 'screen' can be understood as operating a dual function: both revealing the image for what it is (in the sense that a movie is screened for an audience); and concealing the full meaning of that image from the audience, in the manner of a folding screen behind which a lady in a period drama may be *deshabille* while being

hidden from the gaze of a man in the same room.[2] Rajendran (2007) discusses this dual purpose of the screen, inherent in the word itself:

> The screen can be seen as a site for projection as well as a projection of sight since the underlying power of the screen is unequivocally linked to what it actually conceals. With each screen comes a frame that excludes more than it includes. What is onscreen effectively signifies an ongoing relationship with what is off-screen [...] This then frames what is being 'screened' with all that is being 'screened' out. (173)

Here, of course, lies the problem: espousing a thesis based on the unseen aspects of the visible properties of a medium, and locating these properties while simultaneously acknowledging their incomprehensible function. It is a challenge of which Barthes is aware, what he notes as our inability "to achieve more than an unstable grasp of reality". Faced with the cultural object, we are "powerless" he says, "to render its wholeness." Reality, for our purposes, corresponds with the visceral, hidden aspect of the filmed image, and it is worthwhile remembering here Barthes' warning to those who endeavour to connect with the reality of the object: "if we penetrate the object, we liberate it but we destroy it" (2000 [1957]: 159).

Applied to cinema, the analysis of the image is therefore a matter of allowing the visceral element its liberty, while attempting to remove the screen behind which, hitherto, it freely danced. Thus the current project is a concentrated effort to expose that which would rather remain hidden.[3] This, we might argue, is the ultimate aim of any film analysis. As Robert B. Ray uncovers in his *ABCs of Classic Hollywood* (2008), via Adorno (1938: 129) and Mulvey (1989: 16), it is "film studies' traditional project": "to break the spell" of cinema as it exists at "the crossroads of magic and positivism" (Ray: xiv).

Ray, however, is as concerned by the implications of liberating but destroying the object (film) as Barthes. His solution – to liberate a film's meanings without breaking the spell of cinema – is an elegant proposition that, in spirit at least, is applicable to the analysis of visceral cinema. In his book, Ray studies certain key Hollywood texts through a filter that lends a degree of arbitrariness to his analysis. Using every letter of the alphabet, Ray finds an element in his chosen film that begins with each letter. It is through this self-imposed restriction that he feels he is able "to penetrate the movies' veil while retaining their hallucinatory quality" (xv).

So, in each case, Ray finds a detail within a classic Hollywood text and working with that detail, discovering its specific role in the context of the film itself and as part of cinema "in general", in an effort to garner "idiosyncratic" and "unpredictable" results (xxiii). Ray's project, however, is to re-discover the magic of cinema in the objects that are readily available and imminently accessible to the viewer, belonging as they do firmly to the logic of the *mise-en-scene* (an umbrella in *The Maltese Falcon* (231-232); the colour red in *Meet Me in St Louis* (301-304); the painting of a marlin in *The Philadelphia Story* (121)).

While this approach has certain correlations with the analysis of visceral cinema offered here, there is one significant difference. This is that, while Ray scouts the filmed image for meanings in locatable objects, in the study of the visceral elements of film proposed here the meanings are hidden and remain hidden precisely because they have no meaning within the logic of the film. So while there are certainly impulses to retain the 'magic of cinema' throughout this investigation into the visceral elements of cinema, the greater problem lies in finding the language to describe, and to analyse, these meaning-*less* aspects of the image. To do so we must begin by acknowledging that such visceral elements do in fact exist: they are qualities that exceed the logic of the cinematographic image. They are, then, *excessive* qualities of the image, going beyond what meanings a film should reasonably divulge.

Any attempt to understand the value of this excess as it appears in film studies and its relationship to the visceral experience must by necessity acknowledge a debt to Kristin Thompson's seminal essay on the subject, "The Concept of Cinematic Excess" (2004). As in Ray's hypothesis, Thompson here is evaluating cinema through an emphasis on the particular rather than the general; on regarding the individual elements of films rather than on an overarching theory of classifications, types, genres, and so on. Unlike Ray, her systematic approach in analysing such elements does not aim to uncover any hidden meaning, or regard these elements as "clues" (Ray, 2008: xviii). Instead, Thompson asserts that excess operates as a force that effectively opposes efforts to unify a film. It is an agent that resists the logical construction of the film text (2004: 513). We might say then that it is impossible to have the same understanding of an excessive element of a film, because it does not

succumb to the deductive reasoning that Ray employs to interrogate a detail of *mise-en-scene*. Excess is not evidence, it simply is. In this way, Thompson's excess has many commonalities with our first enquiry into the visceral properties of cinema. For in both cases certain elements detach themselves from the 'sense' of the film, threatening its "homogeneity" (513; see also Heath, 1975: 100). Thus excessive and visceral elements oppose (or "subvert" (Thompson, 2004: 515) the intellectual processes that attempt to order the film into a cohesive whole. It is worth continuing to investigate here Thompson's claims for the existence of excess in the filmed image. Her insights present a basis for a theory of visceral cinema. Such groundwork potentially offers a more thorough understanding of the visceral forces at work in cinema, and of the traditional forms of cinema – marked by intellectual unity and homogeneity – which they resist.

EXCESS

Thompson states that the most logical approach to creating intellectual unity/homogeneity in film (as in the novel or theatre) is through the development of narrative, which is the "interplay between plot and story; [where] plot is the actual presentation of events in the film, while story is the mental reconstruction by the spectator of these events in their 'real', chronological order (partly on the basis of codes of cause and effect)" (Thompson, 2004: 514). A film becomes excessive, then, when a visual or auditory "device" appears as a "gap" or "lag" in that film's "motivation" ("the primary tool by which the work makes its own devices seem reasonable"). "At that point where motivation fails, excess begins." (517.) Thus, in establishing film as primarily a material substance (that "depends on materiality for its existence; out of image and sound it creates its structures" (513)) Thompson can expose how all its "physical elements" can never entirely harmonise with the "smooth perceptual cues" demanded by narrative (513, 514). Thompson identifies four categories whereby "the material of the film exceeds motivation" (517). Since these categories present useful access to understanding visceral cinema, these examples will be detailed here.

The first of Thompson's categories pertains to cinematography and *mise-en-scene*, whereby "narrative function may justify the presence of a device, but it doesn't

always motivate *the specific form that individual element will take*" (517). Taking an example from Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible*, Thompson postulates that there "is some range of camera placements which would frame the scene adequately" to suggest the central character's importance and "impressiveness" (517-518). The "choices" made might however exceed what is necessarily required for us to infer Ivan's status (518).

The second category concerns time, so that "[w]e may notice a device immediately and understand its function, but it may then continue to be visible or audible for some time past this recognition." This is particularly pertinent when one views a film several times: "as we become familiar with the narrative (or other principle of progression), the innate interest of the composition, the visual aspects of the decor, or the structure of the musical accompaniment, may begin to come forward and capture more of our attention." The "excessive aspects" can thus be reflected on, so that the "function of the material elements of the film is accomplished, but their perceptual interest is by no means exhausted" (518).

The third category relates to narrative agency, in that "a single bit of narrative motivation seems to be capable of functioning almost indefinitely." Rather than advancing the plot, a "basic function" such as Ivan's intent "to formulate and embody the goal of unifying Russia" in *Ivan the Terrible*, becomes "extremely redundant" when "the repeated use of multiple devices to serve similar functions" merely succeeds "to expand the narrative 'vertically'". In other words, if the train of a continuous narrative is visualised as operating on a horizontal axis propelled by causes and their effects, excess is the disruptive force that ruptures that train's momentum.[4] In this way, such vertically-imposed devices are "foregrounded primarily through their own innate interest" (518).

The fourth category involves the motif. Thompson writes, "[A] single motivation may serve to justify a device which is then repeated and varied many times. By this repetition, the device may far outweigh its original motivation and take on an importance greater than its narrative or compositional function would seem to warrant." In this way a motif may 'outlast' its usefulness, as it becomes less and less integral to the narrative's purpose, so that the insertion of these devices "draw

attention to themselves far beyond their importance in the functioning of the narrative" (518).

These four categories – *mise-en-scene*/cinematography; time; narrative agency; and the motif – are able to inform us of how certain elements may surpass even the most rigorous narrative structure. We may thus be grateful to Thompson for identifying where and how in the activity of the film these elements can break free, and indeed how the problems facing the analyst of excessive *qua* visceral devices extends to the ability of these devices to "elude analysis". She confronts this challenge while considering the material characteristics of the character Efrosinia in *Ivan the Terrible*:

> That one *can* look at the visual figure in the images quite apart from her narrative function seems reasonably certain; we may go further and say with some confidence that one can perceive the visual figure even while following the narrative function it fills. But a discussion of the *qualities* of the visual figure at which we look seems doomed to a certain subjectivity. We may not agree that the texture of Efrosinia's skin has a 'heavy, ugly dullness.' The fact, however, that we can agree it has *some* texture opens the possibility of analysis. (516)

Thus, however much visceral cinema may eventually and necessarily pull away from the concept of cinematic excess as being directly synonymous, a primary reading of both work on an assumption that the "critic and his/her reader must resist the learned tendency to try and find narrative significance in every detail" (516); so that as difficult a task it is to describe and evaluate, both cinematic excess and visceral cinema are essential to gathering a more comprehensive understanding of film.

Indeed, in this vein, Thompson's observations even manage to suggest that excess is a subversion not just of form, but of ideology. Responding to film critic Pauline Kael's "outrage" by *Ivan the Terrible*, which she accuses of being "static, grandiose, and frequently ludicrous" (519; Kael, 1968: 288), Thompson suggests that Kael's reaction "is in part a rejection of excess, the reluctance to consider the uneconomical or unjustified" (Thompson, 2004: 519). Consequently excess and visceral cinema may be allied since they both challenge the balance of form and content laid down by a hegemony of cinema fixated by "standardised usage" (519). In Thompson's understanding, of course, the unified work is an impossibility, since at any time a

device can break free of narrative constraints, which itself is unsettling to those, like Kael, who believe every device can – and should – have some purpose (motivation) in service to the entire film: "the claim that a device has *no* function beyond offering itself for perceptual play is disturbing to many people. Perhaps this tendency is cultural, stemming from the fact that art is so often spoken of as unified and as creating perfect order, beyond that possible in nature" (516). We can add that art as an ideal, as being organised and unified as opposed to nature's chaos is a charge against visceral cinema as much as a denial of excess and its effects.

While excess is certainly disturbing to many people, as Thompson suggests, its ability to occur at any time to disrupt narrative may be noticed by the viewer, or it may not. Excessive elements, while there, may not be visible on a first, or even second, viewing. The 'disunified' elements of a film must be 'sought out' through, for example, the process of analysis by a film theorist. It *may* trouble the casual viewer enough in a primary viewing to find it. But what it is *not* is explicit. It *may* be explicit, but it is not an *a priori* condition for it to be regarded as excessive. For a device to be excessive it need only *insistently* break from narrative cause and effect. It therefore need not disturb through any inherent characteristic, but simply through being inappropriately placed. It may disrupt, confuse our perception of logic and order, but it will not *immediately* affect us, bodily or emotionally; it will not offend us. In short it does not have to impose upon us viscerally. The difference between the visceral and the excessive elements of film is a matter of degree, by which the visceral element cannot be comprehended, but neither can it be ignored. We may sum this up so: all that is visceral is excessive; but not all that is excessive is visceral.

There are, in this case, two considerations in analysing the visceral elements in any given film. One is a matter of identification, of discovering the visceral element in the film; and, in the spirit of Thompson's categories, paying attention to where the ruptures in the logical structure of a film are likely to appear. The other consideration concerns approach, in establishing a method by which the visceral aspect of the image may be analysed and delivered through a process of description, of theory, and through writing. Ray's solution, to puzzle over the minutest details of individual aspects of certain films – while it is designed to offer solutions to the

questions he lays out for himself – presents a tantalising idea of how theory might engage with the incomprehensible aspects of the image.

Thompson and Ray's theoretical positions arise from a commitment to pursuing an alternative to the established approach to film studies, hitherto based on reason, on seeking explanations for images so that they are understood as part of a film's framework. As Ray writes, "the movies are full" of such images; ones that are "mysterious, beautiful, unmoored from any character's perspective, narratively unnecessary" (2008: xii); and while his approach is in fact part of a system from which is proffered ideas that justify the existence of certain elements in certain films, it is the approach itself that begins with the somewhat unorthodox hypothesis that the analyst can work from text to theory without recourse to a preordained set of critical values. It is therefore worthwhile noting at this point that both Ray and Thompson – in her willingness to accept that perhaps some of film's images in fact make no sense – explicitly source Barthes. He, after all, is a writer whose philosophy embraces the idea that certain texts are able to resist meaning; and a writer who, by extension, has a major impact on the theory of visceral cinema proposed here.

LEGIBILITY

Barthes' appeal to critics considering a much more open-ended method of film analysis is evident in the writings chosen by both Ray and Thompson to underpin their theories: *S/Z* (1970) and "The Third Meaning" (1977), respectively. In both these essays,[5] Barthes is instrumental in exposing what Rabate (1997) calls the "hidden codes" that are evident in the literary and cinematic text (4) – the first through a detailed analysis of a short story by Balzac, "Sarrasine"; the second through an interrogation of a series of stills from Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible, Part 1*.

The suitability of *S/Z* to Ray's technique of film analysis is immediately apparent in his avowal of Barthes' approach: "a line-by-line analysis" begun "by dividing his object of study into brief passages, some no more than a few words." (Ray, 2008: xix.) Cogently, Ray observes that Barthes' term for this process, "a slow motion reading" (Barthes, 1970: 12; Ray, 2008: xix) is borrowed from cinema, "and the connection is acute. Filmmaking proceeds by unruly, discontinuous fragments,

disciplined into ex post facto sequences by parsing editors." Ray, inspired by Barthes' meticulous scrutiny of a text from another medium (literature), believes that "film analysis should itself *begin with the details*, the isolated objects and moments potentially obscured by a movie's inexorable momentum." As already mentioned, however, the concomitant "resistance to narrative" that "a fetishistic reliance on details" engenders, for Ray, less a commitment to baldly rendering the hidden aspect of the image for all to see, than an effort to mirror "the way most movies get made" (2008: xix-xx): "[Vincente] Minelli's 'hidden things,' after all, were the result of painstaking attention to *everything*, including what might appear as minutiae." (xx.) Ray's project is therefore to interpret what these carefully placed minutiae could mean, returning the detail to its true function as part of a sense-making narrative.

Barthes' project in *S/Z* is consequently more adventurous in its intent than Ray's volume; for Barthes does not work outwards from a detail of the text in order to verify its meaning, but to acknowledge that, at best, there may be no one true meaning contained within it. "To interpret a text is not to give it a (more or less justified, more or less free) meaning, but on the contrary to appreciate what *plural* constitutes it", he writes (1970: 5). This plurality is not defined as a simple matter of varying points of view on what a detail means within the whole literary work or film, for in "the plural text, there cannot be a narrative structure, a grammar, or a logic" (6); plurality in Barthes' thinking describes texts that contain "codes which are infinite or, more precisely, lost (whose origin is lost)" (10). The plural text can be understood as "writerly," one that liberates the reader from the role of "consumer" to that of the "producer of the text" (4). Certainly Ray facilitates this writerly approach through his method of analysis in the *ABCs of Classic Hollywood*, with its roots as a collaboration between the author and his students at the University of Florida, the book operating "primarily as a *demonstration* of what happens when you ask students to forego (at least initially) conceptualisation in favour of trusting the generative power of a particular operation" (2008: xxiv). Yet in its return to conceptualisation, the power of the operation directs analysis towards what Barthes classifies as the writerly's "countervalue"; "its negative, reactive value" – the "readerly". For Barthes, the readerly text pushes the reader "into a kind of idleness – he is intransitive; he is, in short, *serious*; instead of functioning himself, instead of gaining access to the magic [and] to the pleasure of writing, he is left with the poor

freedom either to accept or reject the text: reading is nothing more than a *referendum*" (1970: 4).

An example taken from Ray's reading of *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) has the author noting that the film "inadvertently deploys the iconography of Nazism, almost certainly familiar to a [contemporary] audience [...] when Hitler's European conquests had reached their peak." Hence there is included in the film's *mise-en-scene* a statue of an eagle, its wings outstretched and with "its head turned to the left," that is recognisable as identical to the iconic eagle adopted by the Nazis (2008: 204). Ray continues that the close association between the eagle and the Maltese cross that would become recognisable as part of the uniforms worn by such screen Nazis as featured in *Casablanca* and beyond further alludes to the fundamental role the Maltese cross plays in the history of cinema; this being "the device perfected by German inventor Oskar Messter [that enables] film projectors to create the illusion of continuous motion." Such a close reading of the *mise-en-scene* uncovers "yet another of the movie's *mise-en-abymes*: the Maltese cross system deployed to project *The Maltese Falcon*'s narrative of betrayals, lies, double crosses." (205.) Ray's technique is thus undeniably writerly in its attention to the details of the film, but by folding these details back into the fabric of the narrative he has returned to a readerly interpretation of what Barthes calls the "classic text" (1970: 4).

This may seem an unduly harsh criticism of Ray's system, but this is not the intention here. Rather, the method employed by *The ABCs of Classic Hollywood* should be seen as a brilliant example of Ray following the spirit of Barthes' pursuit of plurality, by choosing a text (*The Maltese Falcon*, and so forth) that is absolutely a readerly – meaning a *classic*, text – just as Barthes himself chose a classic work of literature – "Sarrasine" – to test out his theory. Yet we might say that in order to fully embrace the technique put forward by Barthes, we must move away from reading the detail present in the film in relation to its place in the narrative (the cross in *The Maltese Falcon* represents the duplicities and schemes of the film's characters) and understand that such conclusions work in opposition to the function of the writerly, this being "the suspension of meaning" (Howard, 1974: xi). In other words, Ray's comprehension of a film's details is formed from the notion that meaning is, and should be the ultimate aim of criticism and analysis; whereas

Barthes asserts that we must be careful in assuming that what we feel is an uncluttered, independent view of the text, *any* text, is in fact culturally determined. So, as Howard confirms, "what we assumed – with the complicity of our teachers – was nature is in fact culture" (ix). A reading – no matter how close – that forces meaning on the text is in danger of explicating only the truth as it is agreed through the process labelled as 'film studies,' an end result obtained through "squeezing the evidence" (Ray, 2008: xix).

One further example from Ray's volume will illustrate this point. Throughout *The ABCs of Classic Hollywood* there is a continuing emphasis on the role of intuition in the practice of close reading Ray adopts (see, for example, xxv; 14-15). Further referencing Barthes, Ray considers why a particular moment in *Grand Hotel* (1932) is "moving". Admitting that his "entire book issues from an intuition about this scene" (14), Ray struggles to "articulate" what it is about this scene that "piques or compels" him, remembering "Barthes' notion" that such moments induce "an interrogative reading" (Barthes, 1977: 53; Ray, 2008: 15). In order to interrogate this moment from the film Ray begins, "Here is my intuition." (Ray, 2008: 15.) Ray locates intuition as the first part of Barthes' process of interrogation, the spark of recognition that there is something in this moment of the film that needs investigating. In truth, intuition is antithetical to Barthes' project, since it operates as part of the structures by which society compels us to think in a certain way. Its synonym, *instinct*, is condemned by Howard as a word that Barthes sets out "to unmask" as an aspect of ourselves that is "acculturated, determined, in bondage" (1974: ix). Intuition/instinct is therefore as culturally determined as Ray's disavowal of certain strands of film studies offering "ready explanations that obscure the actual facts" (2008: xxii). At its worst, Ray's solution – leading as it does also to a final reasoning based upon the 'actual facts' of the film – and through its concentration on instinctual, intuitive response, becomes an act of "terrorism": not a means through which we may interrogate the text at all, but a blind response to certain coded stimuli that we simply accept as our true, deep-seated assessment of it (Howard, 1974: ix). At best we should be vigilant: aware that conclusions based on intuition could be inflected with the socially-constructed attitudes obtained through our contact with the culture that surrounds and defines us.

To be sure, Ray's method of detailed analysis is intended as a pedagogical tool: conceived to run parallel with film studies' standard of 'conceptualisation' rather than intended to overturn the establishment; to facilitate, in other words, students' openness to the text at hand, precisely in the atmosphere of the writerly as described by Barthes as an 'unserious' interaction with the text. The real dilemma, particularly for the purposes of analysing the visceral aspects of the text, is that when we encounter a writerly text – or more precisely adopt a writerly approach to the text – is in acknowledging how easy we may redirect our attentions so that we transform the writerly into the readerly. Such a process is a matter of what Howard defines as "comfort," for "how hard it is to face the open text, [...] plurality [and] the suspension of meaning" (1974: xi).

SEMIOLOGY

This leads to the second theory described here, and inspired by Barthes. Thompson's "The Concept of Cinematic Excess," already outlined above, reworks Barthes' "The Third Meaning" for purposes that are much closer to how a visceral understanding of cinema should be understood here. Barthes' appeal to Thompson, and to *The Visceral Screen*, is that he proposes the "idea that the materiality of the image goes beyond the narrative structures of unity in a film" (Thompson, 2004: 514). Narrative is what excess, and the visceral aspects of the text, resist. Actually, the arena of resistance may be more comprehensively be described as 'meaning,' a term that Barthes uses widely to delineate both the sensible, comprehensible and (undoubtedly) readerly aspects of the text and its opposite: excess, the writerly; a choice of language that Thompson quite rightly suggests is "misleading" (514; see also Barthes, 1977: 49); hence her preference of the term 'excess' to describe those elements that cannot be attributed to motivation. By extension, the current term, 'visceral,' used to demarcate those moments of excess that are unavoidably present in the film and impossible to ignore, is semantically even further removed from any association with (or as) 'meaning.'

The misleading use of the word 'meaning' in Barthes' essay is extended of course from its title; the *third* meaning being the excessive element in the filmed image (in another influence on Thompson, Barthes chooses *Ivan the Terrible, Part 1* as a

sample film to reference and to analyse (Barthes, 1977)). For an analysis if the visceral aspects of the filmed image, however, the concept of a third meaning contributes to a definition of visceral cinema's version of excess as it indicates a property that both moves and inhabits, and is entirely separate, from other aspects of meaning. Furthermore, by being placed in third position in the hierarchy of meaning suggests the attempts made by narrative, sense-making cinema in suppressing it.

What, then, of Barthes' first and second meanings? As maintained by Thompson's essay, these levels are methods through which the image is transported to the viewer and either immediately understood or assembled through a process of analysis. Barthes illustrates these levels of sense-making through considering a brief sequence in *Ivan the Terrible* in which gold coins are poured over Ivan's head as he is ordained as ruler of all Russia. For Barthes, this *mise-en-scene* reveals two levels of sense-making. The first is an "informational level, which gathers together everything I can learn from the setting, the costumes, the characters, their relations, their insertion in an anecdote with which I am (even if vaguely) familiar. This level is that of communication." For the second, Barthes discovers a "symbolic level, which is the downpour of gold and which is itself stratified." Here, the symbols evoked by the *mise-en-scene* are stratified according to an interpretation of the pouring of the gold as an "imperial ritual of baptism". Then there is the symbolism within the diegesis itself: "the theme of gold, of wealth [...] which makes a significant intervention in this scene." There is also what Barthes refers to as "Eisensteinian symbolism"; this being a critical understanding of "the gold or the raining down [...] as held in a network of displacements and substitutions peculiar to S.M. Eisenstein." Lastly there are symbols that place the event in an historical context, "even more widely embracing than the previous ones" in which is revealed "that the gold brings in a (theatrical) playing, a scenography of exchange" (1977: 52).

Before moving on to Barthes' definition of the third meaning in the Eisensteinian text that goes beyond the levels of communication and symbolism, it is impossible to proceed without a more thorough recourse to revealing Barthes' method of interrogating the image, held together by his rendering of Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of semiology, the science of signs. For behind terms such as

'communication' and 'symbolism' lies a rigorous theory of the ubiquity of language developed throughout Barthes' academic life. Furthermore, as Barthes' third meaning is underscored by his thoughts on semiology, it shall also be important to discussing the visceral aspects of the filmed image. Also, before returning to the Barthes' essay, "The Third Meaning," it will be necessary to consider certain of the author's other works in order to understand why he feels that the study of language is so important as a method by which the meanings – in the fullest sense of the word as proposed by Barthes – of texts can be uncovered.

To examine the importance of language in Barthes' writings is to remember that his consideration of Saussurean theory is in fact a *re*consideration of semiology. Saussure conceived semiology as a technique by which written and spoken languages could be analysed. However, while Barthes certainly awakened an interest in this aspect of semiology – particularly in his volume, *Mythologies* (1957) – he also fundamentally expanded the relevance of the science of signs beyond Saussure's purely linguistic model. Indeed we may claim that Barthes' project was to expose all human activity as a series of hidden codes, structures and "non-linguistic languages" that do not occur 'naturally' in society but instead are historical, stemming from the traditions of dominant ideology (Barthes, 1972 [1964]: 152).

History, here, recalls immediately the historical symbolism Barthes finds in *Ivan the Terrible*, and he expands on his definition of this by declaring that the entire second level of meaning in the text (not just Eisenstein's, but any text) "is that of *signification*" (1977: 52). Following Saussure, Barthes understands signification as the stimulating effect of language, of signs on us; in other words, what we interpret from the texts we consume and to which we are exposed. Yet signs themselves can also be divided into elements that describe the process of exposure, named the signifier and the signified in Saussure's linguistic model; and adopted and adapted by Barthes in a thorough analysis of how ideology usurps language in his long essay that concludes *Mythologies*, "Myth Today" (2000 [1957]: 109-156). So, as Barthes suggests, rehearsing Saussure's own concepts, "the signifier is the acoustic image (which is mental)" and "the signified is the concept"; while "the relation between concept and image is the sign (the word, for instance), which is a concrete entity"

(112). Yet, importantly, in advancing this model, Barthes does not merely accept that the "signifier *expresses* the signified", nor even that the sign is "an associative total" of signifier and signified; but that this first "correlation" (111) of sign as a combination of signifier and signified is only "raw material" infused with a "second-order semiological system" (113) through which the sign makes sense to us as "a system of communication" and "a mode of signification" (107). This is the operation of 'myth' that Barthes endeavours to expose throughout his writings from *Mythologies* onwards.

An instance of this second-order semiological system is evident in "The Third Meaning," but a clearer example of *how* it operates can be found in the essay "The Romans in Films", from *Mythologies*, the same volume in which "Myth Today" appears. Here, Barthes considers the workings of myth through an appraisal of Joseph L. Mankiewicz's *Julius Caesar* (1953). In the film, the first-order semiological system is presented to us fairly straightforwardly: such signs are immediately and explicitly obvious as aspects of *mise-en-scene*: the actors, the props, the staging, and so forth. But it is in the second-order semiological system that the full meaning of the film is revealed. For example, Barthes notes that "all the characters are wearing fringes". The fringes, of course, taken in isolation are merely aesthetic objects, but within the context of Shakespeare's tragedy indicate "Roman-ness" (2000 [1957]: 26). This is second-order semiological system at work. There is, after all, nothing fundamentally 'Roman' about the fringes themselves, except that our cultural understanding of the fringe – of this particular style of fringe – informs us that this is so.

Furthermore, Barthes discovers that, in the film, "all the faces sweat constantly"; a sign, he says, "Of moral feeling." Barthes assesses that sweat in this instance "has the function of conveying" the distress of the crowd, affected "by the death of Caesar, then by the arguments of Mark Antony" as well as "horribly tormented virtue" of "Brutus, Cassius, Casca" who, "ceaselessly perspiring" are testament "to the enormous physiological labour produced in them by a virtue just about to give birth to a crime." All these "Labourers, soldiers, conspirators [...] have their austere and tense features streaming" (27); all but one: Caesar himself, "who remains smooth-faced, unperturbed and water-tight" because he alone "does not know" of the

machinations that persist around him, "and so must keep the firm and polished texture of an exhibit standing isolated in a courtroom" (28). Barthes defines this transparent demarcation of schemer and fool as patently cynical: the application of "Vaseline" (27) on the faces of every character but Caesar's produces a sign that "is ambiguous". The meaning of the fabricated sweat in *Julius Caesar* is not in itself unclear (as has already been established); what is ambiguous about it as a sign is that "it remains on the surface, yet does not for all that give up the attempt to pass itself off as depth." He continues, "It aims at making people understand (which is laudable) but at the same time suggests that it is spontaneous (which is cheating); it presents itself at once as intentional and irrepressible, artificial and natural, manufactured and discovered." In other words its formulation begins with the connotative signified, and works backwards to discover an agent (in this case Vaseline) by which the signifier can 'magically' unlock a dishonestly-acquired 'hidden' meaning; and, as Barthes makes it clear, "it is both reprehensible and deceitful to confuse the sign with what is signified" (28).

DENOTATION

By the time of the publication of *S/Z*, Barthes introduces two more terms to his lexicon of methods by which the myths perpetrated by language may be analysed: denotation and connotation. Their importance here is that, as with the relationship between signifier and signified in the example from *Julius Caesar* above, the final interpretation of a text we are encouraged by ideology to make is the one that feels most natural. Barthes states that, as we become aware of the pervasiveness of myth, we must be wary of denotation in particular. In a remarkable phrase, which succeeds in exposing the certainties of our own methods as potential myths, he writes "denotation is not the first meaning, but pretends to be so". Remembering our caution over concepts such as 'intuition' and 'instinct' earlier, what is revealed in this apparently natural, originary well-spring from which all connotations emanate, is an "illusion": so that denotation

> is ultimately no more than the *last* of the connotations (the one which
> seems both to establish and to close the reading), the superior myth by
> which the text pretends to return to the nature of language, to language
> as nature: doesn't a sentence, whatever meaning it releases, subsequent

to its utterance, it would seem, appear to be telling us something simple, literal, primitive [?] (1970: 9)

It is from this reversal of language – one that hitherto is understood as natural, innocent expression –that Barthes' 'third' meaning not only arises, but is seen to be essential as a strategy for undermining ideology's control over culture. The terms used to describe the first two meanings in the example from *Ivan the Terrible* – communication and symbol – are therefore charged with the "intentional force" of ideology, of myth (Barthes, 2000 [1957]: 123).

So, as Barthes' continues his discussion of Eisenstein's film, he finds a level of 'meaning' that cannot be explained through the juxtaposition of elements in the *mise-en-scene*, through the symbols of gold, or through historical analysis. Barthes is aware of another level: "for I am still held by the image. I read, I receive [...] a third meaning – evident, erratic, obstinate." Thompson sees this in the thick, dull make-up of Efrosinia in *Ivan the Terrible*, noted above; while Barthes, also alluding to the use of make-up in the film, finds this quality in

> a certain compactness of the courtiers' make-up, thick and insistent for the one, smooth and distinguished for the other; the former's 'stupid' nose, the latter's finely traced eyebrows, his lank blondness, his faded, pale complexion, the affected flatness of his hairstyle suggestive of a wig, the touching-up with chalky foundation talc, with face powder.

In both these instances the third meaning (this being, of course, Thompson's 'excess') is comprised of an "incomplete" sign, of a signifier without a signified: "I do not know what its signified is, at least I am unable to give it a name, but I can see clearly the traits, the signifying accidents of which this – consequently incomplete – sign is composed". He continues, "On the one hand, it cannot be conflated with the simple *existence* of the scene, it exceeds the copy of the referential motif" (Barthes, 1977: 53);

> on the other, neither can it be conflated with the dramatic meaning of the episode: to say that these traits refer to a significant 'attitude' of the courtiers, this one detached and bored, that one diligent *('They are simply doing their job as courtiers'),* does not leave me fully satisfied; something in the two faces exceeds psychology, anecdote, function, exceeds meaning without, however, coming down to the obstinacy in presence shown by any human body. (53-54)

Such is the territory the visceral aspects of the image inhabit. Barthes' reappropriation of Saussurean linguistic semiology to the larger cultural field does not merely describe the transport of signifier to signified, it opens the possibility for alternatives to the parasitism of ideologically sanctioned image. Terms such as 'writerly' and 'excess' certainly help in defining the visceral image, particularly with regard to Thompson's observation that Barthes' "The Third Meaning" "is based specifically on the material aspects of film as the source of its excess" (2004: 514). The visceral image, here, is precisely defined as such an aesthetic phenomenon, yet whose existence is reliant entirely on a resistance to the categorically assumed verities of cinema, and cinema's place in cultural discourse. In this way the visceral image as aesthetic phenomena is removed from devices such as cause and effect – in other words going "beyond narrative connotations" (520) – but is also resistant to such comfortable, cinematic terms used to define the separation of certain visual aspects such as diegetic and non-diegetic.

Thompson, indeed, is keen to make such divisions. Remarking on Barthes' own use of the term in his essay, she immediately claims that because the third meaning/excess is not "a diegetic entity" (515; Barthes, 1977: 49) it *must* be non-diegetic: "Probably no one ever watches *only* these nondiegetic aspects of the image through an entire film. Nevertheless, they are constantly present, a whole 'film' existing in some sense alongside the narrative film we tend to think of ourselves as watching" (Thompson, 2004: 515). I suggest here, however, that to equate the excessive, *visceral* image with the non-diegetic segments of the cinematic text (such as the musical soundtrack, for instance) is an attempt to 'tidy it away' and admit it as an inessential part of the film. The non-diegetic elements of a film, after all, can be readily accepted as conforming to Barthes' first and second meanings, outlined above, even as they add nothing to the narrative; for they can still be seen to disclose information (the details of personnel involved in the making of the film in the opening credits, for instance) or to act symbolically (a red filter place over the lens of the camera at the moment a character explodes into a rage). For the purposes of the visceral image, such demarcations between diegetic and non-diegetic are far from fixed, particularly as we consider that the existence of the visceral image is identified by its explicitness as part of the cinematic text.

Explicitness: the inclusion of the word to define the visceral aspects of the image removes it still further from the 'merely' excessive. If we must seek out the excessive element in the image, it is not visceral. As Thompson proclaims that excessive elements can occur at any time in any film, she adds

> Repeated viewings of a film are likely to increase the excessive potentials of a scene's components; as we become familiar with the narrative (or other principle of progression), the innate interest of the composition, the visual aspects of the decor, or the structure of the musical accompaniment, may begin to come forward and capture more of our attention. The legibility has shifted for us; we now can simply *recognise* the unifying narrative elements, rather than having to perceive them for the first time. As a result, we now have time to contemplate the excessive aspects. (518)

Excess, then, can occur through a process of *re*-watching, as an *innate* aspect of the *composition* that can be *contemplated*. Re-watching, of course, is the film academic's lot, echoed by Barthes in his advocacy of the re-reading of literature – "tolerated only in certain marginal categories of readers (children, old people, and professors)" (1970: 16) – but the purposes of re-watching the cinematic text is not to discover the visceral image for the first time, but to reaffirm the image's credentials *as* a visceral image. As in Barthes' compulsion in regarding the obstinacy of the courtiers' makeup in *Ivan the Terrible* (he is *held* by the image), the visceral image is immediate, a violent instability in the smooth flow of narrative cause and effect. Re-watching – and re-reading – the cinematic image that contains visceral elements is therefore necessary for the purposes of verification: the image may, after all, simply have been shocking, its impact reliant entirely on its placement within a period of narrative; yet it is also, obviously, necessary for the process of analysis, what Barthes calls the "interrogation" of the signifier that comprises the incomplete sign (1977: 53).

Such interrogation must, however, be achieved with the full awareness of what is at stake. Ideology's annexation of language that is revealed and investigated from *Mythologies* onwards is so pervasive – an effect achieved because it persistently "reflects" on the meaning of signs (Barthes, 1970: 4) – it appears as "culture, knowledge, information" (Barthes, 1977: 55) without having to do any work. In other words, the apparent naturalness and purity of language as appropriated by ideology requires no effort – it *is* signification. Yet in order to reverse, and work

outside this foundational myth, we must be prepared to damage those qualities of the visceral image that are integral to its existence: its indescribability. Barthes is aware of this danger, as he plots a course between two realities: the accepted reality mapped out for us by ideology; and the reality of language to which ideology (through myth) attaches itself: "The fact that we cannot manage to achieve more than an unstable grasp of reality doubtless gives the measure of our present alienation: we constantly drift between the object and its demystification, powerless to render its wholeness." In this way we are walking a tightrope: "For if we penetrate the object, we liberate it but we destroy it; and if we acknowledge its full weight, we respect it, but we restore it to a state which is still mystified." What is in the balance for a study of visceral cinema is the need to recognise, and maintain the reality of the visceral object whilst facilitating an analysis of the structures of both visceral objects and their effects. We are consequently looking towards "reconciliation between reality and men, between description and explanation, between object and knowledge." Barthes acknowledges the near-impossibility of this challenge, stating "that we are condemned for some time yet always to speak *excessively* about reality" (Barthes, 2000 [1957]: 159). Such excessive use of language to attempt to grasp the essence of the visceral image is evident in Barthes and Thompson's discussion of the courtiers and of Efrosinia in *Ivan the Terrible* to understand these images, and certainly in Ray's obsessive attention to detail in analysing *The Maltese Falcon* and other Classic Hollywood films in his book. Such a technique will undoubtedly play a part here in attempting to comprehend the visceral screen.

THE VISCERAL

At the beginning of this chapter, definitions of the word *visceral* confined the word to its descriptive properties. However, language must adapt to the challenge of visceral cinema, first by amending the lexical definition of *visceral* itself. Existing as it does as an adjective, its role in the sentence is dependent on the noun which it describes; it offers merely an entirely subordinate and supportive function. Placed at the forefront of this study, however, the word needs to move beyond its adjectival context, so that we can discuss it not as baldly emphatic, offering ballast to an aesthetic argument (visceral *object*; visceral *device*; visceral *cinema*) or presenting an emotional significance (visceral *effect*; visceral *reaction*) but centred as a noun.

We shall henceforth throughout this study talk not of visceral *matters* and *sensations* as separate functions, but merge them into one noun: *the visceral*. Speaking of the visceral, foregrounding it (as noun) has certain key advantages. By disconnecting the word of its descriptive function, we are removing boundaries that do not exist empirically. In discussing *visceral objects* and *visceral reactions*, we are offering an illusion that there is some clear distinction between cause and effect; that the visceral object exists entirely *out there* and the visceral reaction occurs entirely *in here*. The visceral blurs distinctions between subject and object, so that the word, newly invigorated as a noun, can at last revel in its forceful existence as both corporeal presence onscreen and the physical and emotional response it arouses in the viewer.

To return to Rajendran's observations about screens mentioned earlier, the true purpose of the word as it appertains to the title of this work is made clear as its function as a noun is superseded by the visceral's promotion from descriptive entity to the entity itself. Rajendran writes, "the screen projects a reality by leaving 'reality' out"; in this way the projected reality can "make sense and make meaning in ways that will entertain, engage and entice" (173). The *visceral* screen, however, does the opposite: making no sense and no meaning, what the visceral does is effectively screen *out* the ideologically imposed reality while screening in the alternative reality that escapes all ideological influence.

This chapter has suggested some of the ways in which Barthes' theories have been applied to film studies. The next chapter will look closer at how a Barthesian perspective may be applied to the term 'the visceral' proposed here. Just as importantly, it will indicate ways in which certain aspects of Barthes will *not* be used. In so doing, the chapter will concentrate more on the two *auteurs* who are the subject of this study, and suggest why an essentially *auteurist* analysis is the most appropriate to the thesis. Moreover, it will look at specific examples from Cassavetes and Cronenberg's films to demonstrate why they are prime exponents of this term: the visceral.

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[1] There are so many other ways in which cinematic elements, particularly in combination, can create a visceral effect, to which we can also add cinematographic effects such as focal length and the use of colour, not to mention the influence of music and other non-diegetic additions to the soundtrack

[2] Witness Alice in Hitchcock's *Blackmail* (1929), changing into the showgirl's dress behind the screen in the artist's studio; simultaneously hidden from his sight, but revealed to the audience

[3] The difference here is that Barthes, talking about cultural objects *in general*, implicitly suggests that we must search for these hidden aspects of them. My suggestion is that these aspects are in fact entirely visible. What is 'hidden' is the means by which we can talk about them

[4] The metaphor of horizontality as the 'natural' progression of events over time and verticality as the force that exists outside of narrative has its roots, for sure, in a Western tradition whereby we are taught to 'read' words and sentences along a horizontal axis. Certainly, Metz's formulation of a *grande syntagmatique* (1974) utilises this metaphor to explain how the image we see at any one moment along this imagined horizontal axis is selected from the almost infinite possible variables that could have been used here. Metz's theories will be discussed further in the chapter "John Cassavetes and David Cronenberg: lists and emptiness." Perhaps the most lucid example of horizontality equalling narrative comes in the form of the side-scrolling video arcade game. In these the character controlled by the player is seen from a third person perspective, in profile. The player progresses through the game by moving the character across the screen, from left to right, encountering obstacles and enemies along the way which attempt to delay – or more likely stop – the character's progress

[5] While a full-length volume, Barthes regards *S/Z* as an essay (see Howard, 1974: ix)

CHAPTER TWO

EXPERIMENT

The previous chapter's focus on certain terms revolving around theories of semiology developed by Roland Barthes – 'writerly,' 'third meaning,' 'excess' – should not be misconstrued as adopting an uncritically Barthesian approach towards uncovering the visceral in the cinematic text. Here is the main reason for this. Barthes' theory of the image discussed in relation to "The Third Meaning" in particular, develops towards what he calls an "open field" of meaning; a playing of the signifier whose final connotation is constantly deferred (1977: 55). Barthes sees this as a "disguise" (58); and in the images from *Ivan the Terrible* he interrogates this concept of disguise as part of the essay. The third meaning, Barthes suggests, is evident in the heavy, "pitiful" makeup of certain actors, an obscuring of the limits between "expression" and "disguise" (57) and which he decides, in finding a synonym for the term *third meaning*, to be illustrative of an "obtuse meaning":

> *Obtusus* means *that which is blunted, rounded inform.* Are not the traits which I indicated (the make-up, the whiteness, the wig, etc.) just like the blunting of a meaning too clear, too violent? Do they not give the obvious signified a kind of difficultly prehensible roundness, cause my reading to slip? An obtuse angle is greater than a right angle: *an obtuse angle of 100°,* says the dictionary; the third meaning also seems to me greater than the pure, upright, secant, legal perpendicular of the narrative, it seems to open the field of meaning totally, that is infinitely. I even accept for the obtuse meaning the word's pejorative connotation: the obtuse meaning appears to extend outside culture, knowledge, information; analytically, it has something derisory about it: opening out into the infinity of language, it can come through as limited in the eyes of analytic reason; it belongs to the family of pun, buffoonery, useless expenditure. Indifferent to moral or aesthetic categories (the trivial, the futile, the false, the pastiche), it is on the side of the carnival. *Obtuse* is thus very suitable. (54)

The visceral operates in a different register to the obtuse meaning outlined here. While there are certain terms used to describe the obtuse meaning that correlate with the visceral – both are *greater than the perpendicular of the narrative*, each is *derisory*, and can be interpreted as *limited* – the perceived *uselessness* of the obtuse meaning suggests a capacity for disregard by viewers that is absent in a definition of

the visceral. While the obtuse meaning may momentarily distract the viewer from the narrative, through a play of meaning, the visceral – as implied by the word's etymological roots in the soft innards of the human body – has a powerful, internal effect on the viewer: he has no choice but to notice it. Like the obtuse meaning, it is "a signifier without a signified"; but unlike the obtuse meaning, the problem for the viewer (or the critic) lies not in "the difficulty in naming it," but in its monstrously unexpected appearance as it is forced into the sense-making, narrative world of the cinematic text. Nonetheless, at the level of *reading* the image, we can say that the approach to the obtuse meaning and the visceral is the same: because both these irretrievable aspects of the image do not "represent anything" the critic's language is situated somewhere "between definition and approximation"; each "disturbs" criticism (61). Their differences occur as a matter of degree, of explicitness, and concomitantly, through their capacity to affect the body of the viewer.

Barthes has, however, come closer to a description of the visceral in his final published work, *Camera Lucida* (1981), a book that considers the power the still photograph has over its viewer. For film academics, there is an intensely seductive quality about this volume: *Camera Lucida*'s reflections on the photograph at last offering a lengthy discussion of the mechanical reproduction of reality; not a rhetoric of the *moving* image, exactly, but certainly a step in that direction.

For some it is close enough: Effie Rassos (2001), for instance, finds in the use of the facial close-up in John Cassavetes' film *Faces* a "formidable stillness" that in "moments of anticipation and heightened emotion [...] forces a kind of immobility that begins to pressure the divide between photography and the cinema"; evidence enough for her to evoke the twin terms that permeate *Camera Lucida*: "the *studium* (the elements in the photograph that are culturally coded and that render meaning transparent) and the *punctum* (the elements that disturbs cultural meaning via an affective experience of time that exceeds language)" and map them across her definitions of "meaning" and "affect".

The temptations of *Camera Lucida*'s foundational terms extend to any discussion of the presence of the visceral in the cinematic text, of course: with the *studium*, for example, offering connotative meaning within the safety of culture; and the *punctum* as the visceral effect that stands outside language and attacks those concepts we

understand. But it is wise to be cautious: when Rassos writes of the relationship between cinema and photography as "glued together, limb by limb, like the condemned man and the corpse" (see also Barthes, 1981: 6), she may be quoting Barthes but the context has changed; for Barthes here is not discussing the connection between the moving image and the still, but between the photograph and "what it represents" (Barthes, 1981: 5). Indeed, Barthes clearly demarcates cinema and photography in his book, frankly stating their polarity early on: "I decided I liked Photography *in opposition* to the Cinema"; and while he had hitherto "failed to separate" the two media, his concepts of the *studium* and *punctum* can be seen as an effort to "learn at all costs what Photography was 'in itself', by what essential feature it was to be distinguished from the community of images [such as cinema]" (3).

The photograph alone fulfils Barthes' criteria: only in the photograph can the tension between the *studium* and the *punctum* exist. Yet in writing of the visceral, I find in Barthes' *punctum* a tantalising model from which to progress. In writing of the *punctum*'s ability to "disturb the *studium*"; that it is a "sting, speck, cut, little hole"; and that it is an "accident which pricks me" he is describing a facet of the visceral which is already known and easy to comprehend (27). But in his suggestion that the *punctum* is also "poignant", Barthes offers a way of widening definitions of the visceral beyond those offered by "The Third Meaning" or *S/Z*. The need to understand the visceral in the light of the photographic *punctum* becomes even more urgent when one considers how Barthes distinguishes it from "'shock'; for the photographic 'shock' (quite different from the *punctum*) consists less in traumatising than in revealing what was so well hidden that the actor [the subject of the photograph] was unaware or unconscious of it" (32).

'Shock' is characteristic of a certain way in which certain definitions of the visceral may be formulated, and must be overcome if the visceral is to be realised beyond the realms of certain aspects of cinema which are seen to habitually bypass the viewer's brain, such as spectacle. The aim here, in other words, is to redefine Barthes' pejorative description of shock as something rehearsed by the still photographer and known only to him, and reposition it in cinematic discourse as a destabilising force known to no one; that emerges spontaneously to the viewer, no longer placed

cynically in front of him but indescribable in the manner of the photographic *punctum*.[1]

In cinema, shock can be regarded as antithetical to the term *suspense*, famously espoused by Hitchcock through a theoretical scenario:

> We are now having a very innocent little chat. Let us suppose that there is a bomb underneath this table between us. Nothing happens, and then all of a sudden, 'Boom!' There is an explosion. The public is surprised, but prior to this surprise, it has seen an absolutely ordinary scene, of no special consequence. Now, let us take a suspense situation. The bomb is underneath the table, and the public knows it, probably because they have seen the anarchist place it there. The public is aware that the bomb is going to explode at one o'clock and there is a clock in the décor. The public can see that it is a quarter to one. In these conditions this same innocuous conversation becomes fascinating because the public is participating in the scene. (In Truffaut, 1978: 79-80)

As in Barthes' description, Hitchcock sees shock as a lesser mode of address; and indeed in the context of the 'bomb under the table' it cheapens the idea of the visceral sensation to the realm of the momentary thrill. Hitchcock continues his observation by explaining thus:

> In the first case we have given the public fifteen seconds of surprise at the moment of the explosion. In the second case we have provided them with fifteen minutes of suspense. The conclusion is that whenever possible the public must be informed. Except when the surprise is a twist, that is, when the unexpected ending is, in itself, the highlight of the story. (80)

What is most important for the purposes of separating the visceral-as-shock versus the visceral-as-*punctum* is that both suspense and surprise, according to Hitchcock, are elements of narrative. While shock effects may jolt the spectator, they emanate from the situation in which the characters are placed. Shock is then merely a shortcut, the fastest way to travel from point A to point B without the extended timeframe that suspense operates within. As Nichols (2010) states:

> Suspense is a key difference between storytelling and logical discourse: reason seeks the simplest, clearest, shortest path to the solution of a problem, while narration looks for ways to postpone or delay the resolution so that the psychology of the characters, the complexity of situations, and the suspense of not knowing what will happen next gain intensity. (514)

Both shock and suspense result from logic: this follows that. Both exist as agents of communication and of symbolism (to return to Barthes' first and second meanings). In other words, they are intended, they are "performances" (Barthes, 1981: 32), and so far removed from the visceral as it is proposed here, *qua* the *punctum*, as a "detail" that "distresses" the viewer (40).

It is for this reason the choices of films to interrogate for reading the visceral are so important. Unlike Thompson, for whom excess can appear at any time in any film (particular through a process of re-watching), the immediacy of the visceral – and whose visceral 'status' is confirmed by being undiminished over repeated viewings – necessitates that certain films are automatically excluded from having a visceral impact (in the sense we are discussing here). In general terms – as may be understood from the character of the discussion so far – we can locate the visceral in texts that contain a certain aesthetic 'looseness'; whereby there is an evidential sense that not everything in the *mise-en-scene*, the editing, the *practice* of filmmaking is entirely under the control of the filmmaker. These may be constraints forced upon the creation of the film by financial considerations, by the limitations of the technology, or by the 'talent' of the filmmaker. The competency (or otherwise) of a film's personnel may of course be compensated for by commercial and technological solutions; in other words, the machinery of capital and the capital of machinery, so that the film itself becomes a hermetically sealed entity containing no cracks through which the visceral can seep: everything 'makes sense.' As Elsaesser (2004) reflects, it is here that the cinema operates "as site of the economy's symbolic realm in the sphere of consumption, and as site of the state's symbolic realm in the sphere of discipline and control (censorship, self-regulation)" (67). Following Barthes' observation, this is the territory of myth, of ideology, from which every uninvited element – excessive, obtuse, visceral – has been plucked.

DETAILS

The visceral, then, should not be sought out in Hollywood; the Hollywood, that is of "popular cinema, representing commerce, mass-entertainment and consumption" (Elsaesser, 2005 :9). Analysis of such works tend to remain on the levels of communication and symbolism, in the manner of Ray's *ABCs of Classic Hollywood*,

whereby details are found in the *mise-en-scene*, assessed, and then returned to the narrative; a writerly approach to the text that ultimately retrieves readerly results. Everything, in the case of the Hollywood movie, has an expositionary role, can be recalled and accounted for on a balance sheet; in the manner of Vincente Minelli, for instance, who

> took enormous – and to some fellow participants, sometimes infuriating – trouble composing the frames [...] A former window-dresser, he regarded the apt placement of almost unobtrusive objects as essential. One daily report of the filming [of *Meet Me in St Louis*] recorded, '3:20-3:26 Wait for perfume bottle (special container with satin lining asked for by director). (Kaufman, 1994: 40; also Ray, 2008: xx)

It is this "painstaking attention to *everything*, including what might appear as minutiae" (Ray, 2008: xx) that excludes the visceral. The visceral relies on chance, on the disintegration of production values, on the debasement of a *mise-en-scene* that, outside of an efficient Hollywood creation that is designed to be read, has neither the commercial support nor the technological resources to be resolved by the language of ideology.

Against this pressure of motivation in all aspects of the cinematic image, there is of course such a thing as an entirely non-narrative trajectory in cinema. Independent of the mainstream, avant-garde and experimental cinema offers a force of "rebellion" against "the general decadence, conservatism, and repressiveness of [Hollywood] commercial cinema" (MacDonald, 2006: 5). It is possible to make claims that certain avant-garde films, in their quest to "explore questions of form" (Nichols, 2010: 83) define a certain type of visceral cinema, made by filmmakers who, "with virtually no equipment and no money" can nonetheless "transform the screening space" (MacDonald, 2006: 57).

Certainly, there are disturbing images in the avant-garde film; images that emerge from the architecture of the film's making. Stan Brakhage's "cameraless" cinema (Schlicht and Hollein, 2010) as evidenced by *Mothlight* (1963) – in which the wings of moths are appended directly on to the celluloid strip – and his montage experiments with the home movie format, display a chaotic relationship between the medium of 16mm and 8mm film and the actual images displayed on the film stock and projected for the audience. *Window Water Baby Moving* (1962), which

intersperses intimate details of the Brakhage home with graphic, close up footage of Stan's wife Jane giving birth. According to one friend of Brakhage, Carolee Scheneeman, the male reaction to the film was extreme: "at early screenings of *Window Water Baby Moving*, there were men who threw up, rushed out of the theatre in revulsion and panic" (2005: 83); a physical response attributed by Maya Deren (a fellow avant-garde filmmaker) to the fact that, through the film, men were being "permitted to see what they're not supposed to see" (in Silver, 2008). As Silver states, "It is likely that Brakhage was depending upon a visceral reaction to his film [...] one that would reduce an audience's guard so they were exposed to all the film's elements" (2008).

The spectator's visceral reaction upon which Brakhage is relying indicates an awareness of effect not entirely removed from the attention to detail found in the Hollywood product. In both cases, we could argue, there is a certain commitment to the aesthetic as achieving a desired response from the viewer. More importantly, the avant-garde work is signalled as experimental, free of narrative constraints and possibly unsettling by its entrenchment in a particular site of display. Unavailable in the multiplex, mainstream, or even independent cinemas, the avant-garde work most readily becomes available for public viewings in the venue of the art museum, where it is packaged as representative of a particular historical or philosophical thesis. Brakhage's *oeuvre*, for instance, becomes part of the "Beyond the Frame" exhibition catalogue at Germany's Badischer Kunstverein, as part of a collection of transcendental, experimental films. The visceral does not inhabit such works, for in their concentration on form, they are anticipated by the viewer who, facing the absence of narrative, is forced to make other connections, ultimately accepting the status of what is being seen: as pure art. The avant-garde focus on surface, on texture does not fully apprehend what Drew Leder (1990) describes as "the anonymous strata of the visceral, a prenatal history, the body asleep" (62). From this observation, the visceral is, in Barthes' reworking of semiology (2000 [1957]), "a hidden facet" of the image; one that does very much occupy an ineffable territory that pre-exists human understanding.

In the domain of language, Barthes conceives of a "visceral sign." It is composed of elements that are the exact opposite to what he identifies as the "intellectual sign." Thus Barthes envisages that at their purest, signs ought to be

> either openly intellectual and so remote that they are reduced to an algebra, as in the Chinese theatre, where a flag on its own signifies a regiment; or deeply rooted, invented, so to speak, on each occasion, revealing an internal, a hidden facet, and indicative of a moment in time, no longer of a concept (as in the art of Stanislavsky, for instance). (28)

The pure forms of avant-garde cinema are, in this categorisation, ultimately remote and intellectualised processes. They are art forms, a status attributed to them by history and by the means through which they are exhibited. Therefore in their construction they are no less motivated than the sense-making narratives of commercial cinema.

LIMITS

Where, then, does the visceral most assuredly mark the text of the film? In whose cinema can the visceral – explicit, a signifier without a signified – be found? Remembering Barthes' *S/Z*, the writerly eliminates the idleness of consumption, eradicates the ideologically-imposed verities of meaning. The visceral, too, is writerly through opposition to an acceptance of meaning at the level of the outer surface of the film: its forceful, explicit energies attract and are recognised as significant, just as they offer no solution to its significance. It is a paradox, for while it most certainly exists, the visceral escapes full explanation, full disclosure, full meaning; *qua* Barthes: "There may be nothing to say about writerly texts", there may be nothing to say about the visceral (1970: 4); after all, like the writerly text, it "is not a thing" (5) and where it can be found, it is only be found "by accident, fleetingly, obliquely in certain limit-works" (4-5).

The limit-works Barthes thinks of exist primarily in literature and not in film. But as suggested by Elsaesser and Buckland cinema too can discover aspects of the writerly (2002: 146-60). There can exist, as a consequence, such a thing as the cinematic limit-work.[2] Barthes agrees: "The best films (to me) are those which best withhold meaning", which get "rid of all parasite meanings". While this "is extremely

difficult", Barthes posits Bunuel's *The Exterminating Angel* (1962) as "a film which disturbs profoundly, and which forces you to go beyond dogmatism, beyond doctrines": it has "significance"; it is not at all "absurd" (Barthes, 1963: 21).

The example of Bunuel posited by Barthes as a limit-work suitable for interrogation here should be instructive *vis a vis* interrogating cinematic texts within which the visceral is present. Certainly *The Exterminating Angel* can be seen as characteristic of a type of film that exists somewhere between Hollywood product and avant-garde experiment; an example of arthouse rather than artist's cinema. There are, in this case, many possibilities of films that could qualify for the current study. However, in searching for a suitable candidate, how should we proceed? By country, continuing for instance with Spain, by including *Abre los ojos*, *Sex and Lucia* or *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*; or by the output of that country's auteurs – Amenabar, Medem, Almodavar? Just as it would be a profound mistake to continue talking of the visceral in abstract terms, it would be a similar error to attempt to cover the entire polysemy of texts across which the visceral is potentially dispersed. To do so would be merely to *note* the presence of the visceral: to attempt a classification of the unclassifiable. What this study needs are test cases; instances in which I have found the presence of the visceral, as Barthes and Thompson found in *Ivan the Terrible* the obtuse meaning and excess, respectively.

Of course, to narrow this study to a discussion of national cinemas or auteurs runs the risk of narrowing the scope of interrogation too; of straying into the realm of the readerly. For example, it may be possible to find the visceral across similar cinematic texts and essentially engage in an act of "rebranding" that re-installs the ineffable qualities of films into the narratives of national identity; the ease and desirability of which Elsaesser (2005) makes (rhetorically) very clear:

> How useful is the cinema as a tool for 're-branding' a nation ('Cool Britannia,' 'Modern Spain,' '*la France profonde*,' the 'Berlin Republic'), compared to the re-branding that can be accomplished through the visual arts (the 'successful' campaign by Maurice Saatchi in launching the YBA's, the Young British Artists), a soccer world cup (France in 1998, re-branded as a multi-cultural society) or say, hosting the Olympic Games (as in the case of the Barcelona Games re-branding Catalan identity)? (61)

The answer, for our purposes, is that rebranding works very well as it reaffirms the uncluttered truths by which countries and cultures are defined. A study of the visceral must move away from these readerly impositions, as tempting as they may be.

VOICES

There is, however, another point, which stems from a necessary idiosyncrasy of this study. *The Visceral Screen* is about film language and the incapability of semiology to grasp certain aspects of the filmed image. Written in English, this interrogation of the visceral in cinema makes one bold assertion: that the visceral adheres to and erodes narrative cinemas that are otherwise *linguistically* indistinguishable from those of the mainstream. In other words the visceral appears in spite of the familiarity of the spoken and written language, the language of hegemony and of ideology, which occurs as part of the overall discourse of the film. The very 'foreign-ness' of Spanish cinema (to continue the example from above) watched by an audience unused to the meanings of the Spanish language and for whom dialogue must be communicated via the subtitle, implants the myth of separateness, of an arthouse aesthetic into the text; it is a cinema that must be 'watched differently.' The visceral can no doubt be present in these texts, but its effect is diminished for the non-Spanish speaker. It is a part of the wider aesthetic of the arthouse film – and the inclusion of subtitles is a huge clue that what is being seen is an arthouse film – that there will be ambiguity. As Bordwell et al state, "Whereas the classical [Hollywood] film solicits a univocal reading, the slogan of the art cinema might be, 'When in doubt, read for maximum ambiguity'" (1985: 374). Such ambiguity is certainly important in *problematising* the meaning of certain texts, but in the very instance of encountering the visceral (which resists, rather than plays with meaning), a reading of a visceral image could well be construed as 'mere' ambiguity if the context in which that image appears is consistently portrayed as pure art.

It is very worthwhile being aware that it is in such ambiguity that Barthes discusses and praises certain strands of literature. On the works of Robbe-Grillet, for instance, Barthes detects a forced suspension of meaning that comes through frustrating narrative sense:

> Since [...] things are buried under the assorted meanings with which
> men, through sensibilities, through poetry, through different uses, have
> impregnated the name of each object, the novelist's labour is in a sense
> cathartic: he purges things of the undue meaning men ceaselessly
> deposit upon them. How? Obviously by description. Robbe-Grillet thus
> produces descriptions of objects sufficiently geometrical to discourage
> any induction of poetic meaning and sufficiently detailed to break the
> fascination of the narrative. (1972: 198)

As Culler (2001) notes, Barthes is advocating the novelist's ability "to unexpress the expressible" (*inexprimer l'exprimable*), to problematise the meanings our cultural codes otherwise confer, and thus to unwrite the world as it is written by prior discursive practices" (441). Such a technique can also be found in Robbe-Grillet's film work. His script for the 1961 film *Last Year At Marienbad* (directed by Alain Resnais) is a labyrinthine hall of mirrors populated by characters whose relationship to each other and to the country house estate they populate is only half-revealed, and that half only obliquely. However, this ambiguity leads the film to be read as oneiric (see for example Mulvey, 2003; Marker, 2001); and as Barthes states, "it is this ambiguity which counts, which concerns us, which bears the historical meaning of an oeuvre that seems peremptorily to reject history. What is this meaning? The very opposite of a meaning, i.e., *a question*. What do things signify? What does the world signify?" (1972: 202.)

The visceral operates differently. In its explicitness it affects the viewer at a bodily level; its ineffable, hidden characteristics therefore lie as a physical depth within the film, not as an unanswerable riddle. Its relation to language is therefore defined as resistance; it is not interpretable through dream-logic or ambiguity. From this it is possible to claim two readings of Barthes the semiologist for our purposes. The first is the Barthes of literary criticism, engaged in the endless play of the signifier, the eternal deferment of meaning. This is the Barthes of ambiguity. The second Barthes – concerned with the semiology of cultural structures beyond literature – more readily embraces the possibilities of non-meaning. Hence, in Barthes' writings alluded to above there is the separation of *Ivan the Terrible*'s "baptism of gold" from psychoanalytic, economic or dramaturgic symbolism (1977: 52, 53); the proposed existence of the *punctum* as part of the photographic image; and the visceral sign as part of cinema. This is the Barthes who extols the virtues of "figuration" in certain texts, particularly film, which "will *always* be figurative (which is why films are still

worth making) – even if it represents nothing” (1975: 55). In this context, figuration *is* the visceral *in extremis*: corporeal, palpable, immediate; directly plugged in to the viewer’s body and accessing what Rabate terms the body’s “personal ecstasies” (1997: 4).

In this way, continuing from an acknowledgement of the problems inherent in the art film’s suitability for interrogation as visceral text, there are films – regardless of language – which must also be discounted. These are films that knowingly, ironically play with the forms and tropes of film language; such as the English-language ‘smart’ cinema identified by Sconce as “an American school of filmmaking that survives (and at times thrives) at the symbolic and material intersection of ‘Hollywood’, the ‘indie’ scene and the vestiges of what cinephiles used to call ‘art’ films” (2002: 351). These are films in which figuration is neutralised by a blankness of approach; committed to the film as language-game. Brereton (2011), for example, sees in the viewer’s desire to re-watch the film *Donnie Darko* (Richard Kelly, 2001) the need “to tease out any difficulties [...] in decoding the confusing storyline,” so that the film becomes a puzzle in the manner of a Chinese Box, wherein the solution is seen to be ‘there,’ but obfuscated by temporal and aesthetic structures that effectively scramble the viewer’s quest for meaning. Such films are closer to Barthes’ appropriation of a semiology that manipulates the sign through a process of presenting innumerable signifieds; than the sign system through which the signifier has no corresponding signified, is consequently incomplete and ultimately unreadable through the act of signification. It is this act – the act of annihilating the sign itself (Barthes, 1977: 167) – that the visceral achieves.

It is, therefore, in a particular English-language cinema – the language of the Hollywood movie star, of course – that I have decided to search for the visceral. It follows that despite the multiplicity of other cinemas that have English as their first language (British, Irish, Australian and so forth) that the visceral should, perhaps, be most acutely felt in North American cinema; the template, for good or ill, of the sense-making narrative. Indeed, as Derrida states – in the documentary that bears his name (2000) – despite French influence on the inception and early development of the medium, cinema has become an American concern. Within an environment of consumerism, the visceral is ignited in films that have aesthetic and linguistic

similarities with those works aimed at the mainstream cinemagoer and the art cinema that remains an object of fascination for both the serious cineaste and the academic.

PROCESS

Cassavetes and Cronenberg are filmmakers who allow the presence of the visceral consistently into their films. These are not the only two *auteurs* of American cinema for whom this can be claimed, but they are the two on whom I have decided to concentrate. Indeed, in the manner of Rombes' characterisation of the role of "humanities-based academic prose" as one of experiment (2005), the apparent arbitrariness in choosing these two individuals as the centre of this study makes sense. Their appeal to me as the authors of particular texts lies in their ability to continually effect me, as possibilities for academic study, but also bodily, what Barthes delineates as pleasure and ecstasy:

> Whenever I attempt to 'analyse' a text that has given me pleasure, it is not my 'subjectivity' I encounter but my 'individual', the given which makes my body separate from other bodies and appropriates suffering or pleasure to it: it is my enjoying body I encounter. And this enjoying body is also *my historical subject*; for it is at the end of a very complex process combining biographical, historical, sociological and neurotic elements (education, social class, childhood configuration, etc.) that I balance the contradictory interplay of (cultural) pleasure and (noncultural) ecstasy. (Barthes, 1975: 62)

This is not to say that my choice of Cassavetes and Cronenberg as exponents of visceral cinema have no theoretical connection, no critical foundation upon which they can be discussed *together*. It is not enough that (as the following chapters will show) the films of Cassavetes and Cronenberg are revealed as exponents of the visceral; they must, in the light of their very dissimilarities, justify their inclusion as subjects of an overarching process; in other words, of research.

The development of a method of interrogation that operates from two unlike terms – in this case 'Cassavetes' and 'Cronenberg' – is not new. For sure, such a process is evident in Ray's *The ABCs of Classic Hollywood*, already cited; and in the similarly inflected "An Alphabet of Cinema" by Peter Wollen:

> I am going to begin at the beginning, with A. Perhaps with the collaborative film *A & B in Ontario* that Joyce Wieland made with Hollis Frampton, and completed after his death – in which each

   filmmaker in turn shot a segment of their own for the other to respond
   to, like a game of tag, or a cinematic dialogue [...] (2002: 1)

In a similar way, there is in the unquestionably great differences between Cassavetes and Cronenberg a cinematic dialogue that occurs at the level of the visceral; discovered through a method of watching and rewatching the films. It is, perhaps, in Barthes we may discover the virtues of this approach: it is after all the focus of much of his work mentioned here; but most determinedly in *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* (1976), an enquiry into the pleasures of the text that similarly discusses authors never habitually mentioned together. Barthes' preface to that volume serves adequately to clarify the general conditions of the approach adopted here; in both there "is no intentional provocation in this assembling"; and "no arbitrariness" in the decision to combine these figures. For Barthes Sade, Fourier and Loyola are the "founders of languages" (3); for me, Cassavetes and Cronenberg, *between* themselves, in their opposing techniques and philosophies, exemplify the limits of the visceral.

MONSTERS

There are undoubtedly certain forces of influence on both John Cassavetes and David Cronenberg that connect them. They both majored in English at university (Cassavetes at Champlain and Colgate (Fine, 2005: 9); Cronenberg at Toronto (Rodley, 1997: 1)) a fact that not only reveals a commitment to the arts, but also a certain social standing as part of the post-War bourgeoisie. It is here that, as they branched into film production, their commitment to the visceral may be seen as doubly inappropriate; not merely that the content of their films should be so antagonistic, but that these films should be authored by educated people. And it is in their abilities to exist both as part of the mainstream and to react against it that the visceral components of Cassavetes and Cronenberg's cinema emerge. Cassavetes, after all, worked as an actor before becoming a filmmaker, and continued to appear in mainstream Hollywood films at the same time he was subverting the Hollywood style through his own works. Cronenberg, too, works as an actor in other people's films, and his own films are variously personal and studio projects. *The Dead Zone*, for instance, is based on a bestseller by Stephen King and had a major backer in the form of Dino DeLaurentiis (Rodley, 1997: 214); he also directed commercials for Cadbury Caramilk and Nike (217).

While connected by these aspects and by the principles and tenets of auteurism, John Cassavetes and David Cronenberg are, nonetheless, contradictory agents of cinema: Cassavetes, for instance, favours a "restlessness and constant movement" in his films (Kouvaros, 2004: ix); while Cronenberg's are consistent in their "intensity and concentration" (Beard, 2006: xi). Cassavetes "didn't want to tell stories" and "rated the technical aspects of movie-making at 'about eight per cent' of a film's total worth" (Charity, 2001: xi); Cronenberg, on the other hand, is a storyteller to the extent that even when adapting a non-linear narrative from page to screen (notably *Naked Lunch*) he fashions it into a recognisable, and cinematic, process (Beard, 2006: 277-278; Browning, 2007: 121-122). Most importantly, both directors are often described as visceral, but the understanding of what makes each of their works visceral is very different: for Cassavetes, visceral cinema is spontaneous, concerned with "people, not places" (Kouvaros, 2004: 8), "impatient", "structured around the freedom of the actor", with the films themselves "shot handheld, in long takes, with the most general lighting; [with frequently] grainy, or ill-focused [images]" (Charity, 2001: xi). Cronenberg's visceral manifests openly in images of "disease and other forms of bodily transformation" while adhering to a more austere, composed cinematic style (Beard, 2006: x). Can one then propose Cassavetes and Cronenberg as occupying two ends of the visceral spectrum: one characterised by films driven by an instinctive, 'irrational' style; the other delivered through the graphic content of his films?

If one believes this is indeed the case, the visceral impetus can be detected in certain key observations by the filmmakers themselves on creative praxis. For Cassavetes, somewhat predictably, it comes in the form of a quote that retrospectively may be seen to initiate his course as a director. In 1957, on the radio talk-show *Jean Shepherd's Night People*, Cassavetes was interviewed about "liberal social conscience drama" *Edge of the City*, the film in which he starred with Sidney Poitier (Charity, 2001: 16). Cassavetes, primarily an actor, had already begun using improvisation in an acting class he was running in New York. Thus, although on air to ostensibly promote the New York 'realism' of one movie, Cassavetes spoke out: "*Edge of the City* only scratches the surface". He stated that if a filmmaker had "a hundred thousand dollars" that he could make, "If people really wanted to see [it,] a movie about people" (19). The resultant film, *Shadows*, became the template for

Cassavetes' independent cinema: independent of studio finance and control, independent of causal narrative, indicative of a "working practice [...] entirely antithetical to the Hollywood industrial model, aesthetically, politically, even morally." Though scripted, "even if those scripts were sometimes arrived at through close collaboration with the actors", the level of improvisation in all Cassavetes' films were informed by the idea of "improvised motion"; a technique that "prioritises the actor to explore the emotions within a scene". The camera is therefore freed to follow performance, ignoring the "preconceived notion of angles or blocking", or the storyboard approach of "Spielberg, Hitchcock or Scorsese" (22). Cassavetes' plan to dig beneath the surface of the "didactic and simplistic" drama exemplified by *Edge of the City* succeeds to expose the primitive heart beneath the civilised veneer of the middle classes; his cinema reaches this visceral intensity through restless, handheld camerawork, the use of real locations and a commitment to the performance above the 'sense' of the scene (17).

Of the quotes attributed to Cronenberg, one frequently cited details his aim, since *Shivers*, "to show the unshowable, to speak the unspeakable" (In Rodley, 1997: 43; Browning, 2007: 35). These are images for which there is "no common currency [in] the imagination" (Cronenberg in Rodley, 1997: 43): they are visceral because they are shocking, strange and transgressive; and are very much linked to what commentators on the Cronenberg *oeuvre* have dubbed 'body horror': "images – and ideas – that are as deliberately repugnant as they can practically be made to be." (Beard, 2006: ix and 29.) These visceral images interweave special effects and horror cinema to reveal "the abject" (Kristeva, 1982): "Faeces, sexual fluids, blood, and spittle, all things expelled – 'ab-jected' – from the body interior". These are images that are "culturally constructed as disgusting", in contrast to the "clean and proper body", so that the "frightening otherness of the insides of other people's bodies" can be found not only in the horror parasites of *Shivers* but also the gouging of the eye in the crime drama *Eastern Promises*: images rendered explicitly (Beard, 2006: 29) in Cronenberg's cinema allow the unshowable to be shown; the unspeakable to speak.

Cassavetes' improvisation as visceral process; Cronenberg's abjection as visceral image[3]: while these approaches provoke different aesthetics, the two filmmakers are reaching for the 'truth' behind improvisation and abjection; reaching beyond the

boundaries of what is acceptable through the practice of visceral cinema. Cassavetes "complicates a scene", "disrupt[s] structure" in an effort to discover what is 'unknown' about human behaviour (Charity, 2001: 30); he believed "that to compromise an idea is to soften it, to make an excuse for it, to betray it" (Cassavetes, in Charity, 2001: 25). Cronenberg, meanwhile, "like[s] to say, during the course of the film, 'I'm going to show you something you are not able to believe, because it'll be so outrageous or ridiculous or bizarre. But I'm going to make it real for you. I'm going to show you this is for real!'" (Cronenberg in Rodley, 1997: 43.)

Two moments from the films of Cassavetes and of Cronenberg will suffice to illustrate the manner of territory the visceral inhabits, and why meaning may, at best, be contested and at worst denied altogether. The sequences chosen are deliberately spatial and immediate in construct, prioritising the aesthetic dimensions of the image, in keeping with the concept of the visceral as physical form already elucidated so far in this study. This theme of the interrogation of bodily and architectural space will continue throughout *The Visceral Screen*.

The first image is a still from Cronenberg's *Videodrome*. In it a hand has been stripped at the wrist; all that identifiably remains is the skin of an arm projected from a plaid-patterned shirt. But what has become of the hand?

Figure 1: A hand grenade? *Videodrome* **(David Cronenberg, 1982 [©Universal Pictures/The Criterion Collection]) Screen capture**

Writers on the film and the Cronenberg *oeuvre* search for descriptions, the most common of which play on the words "hand" and "grenade" (e.g. in Beard, 2005: 159) – a German *Masher* recognisable from films set in World War II – particularly in the context of the film as accompanying the image is an audible 'ticking', a countdown to the moment the character explodes, consumed by brief flame and white smoke.

This is not to say Beard's interpretation is incorrect: it is on the contrary highly plausible when considering the evidence as a calculation of contiguous elements in an equation (object + ticking + explosion = object is grenade). But in Cronenberg's lexicon of extreme, 'unshowable' images, should the answer be that simple, particularly if the representative description becomes standard coinage in discussions about the image? The visceral properties of the image are therefore in danger of no longer obtaining the unease and presence of figuration, but merely being a representation of an object which itself is not common outside the context of World War II action spectacles. Would it not be preferable for the object to retain its visceral quality, its three-dimensionality; to, as Barthes suggests, *represent nothing*?

The image's ugliness allows critics grope at possible synonyms for the image from *Videodrome*, ignoring its inelegant, asynchronous, *dripping* qualities; while similar attempts at validation of Cassavetes' films reinvigorate them as conventional works, manufacturing what Kouvaros observes "as just another Hollywood film". Using *Shadows* (1959) as an example, one can see how a "reappraisal" of the film attempts to show the ways in which the "radical cinema impulse" of Cassavetes is denied (Kouvaros, 2004: 22):

> Paving the way for Cassavetes' Hollywood career, [*Shadows*] made use
> of production values sufficiently different from the industrial norm and
> it appropriated just enough of the counterculture to provide an edge of
> novelty, but in neither case was it so different that it called into question
> the industrial feature or its social function. (James, 1989: 90; Kouvaros
> 2004: 22)

The visceral aspects of Cassavetes' films are thus transformed, offering merely an 'edge of novelty' to make them appear 'counter-cultural'. What this characterisation ignores is the improvisatory process: not, that is, the ongoing debate over how much of the Cassavetes *oeuvre* is scripted; but how far the films, in relation to a 'Hollywood' or 'counterculture' style, do not comfortably fit into either category. Examining a brief excerpt from *Shadows* will clarify this point.

Figure 2: Ten consecutive shots from *Shadows* (John Cassavetes, 1959 [©Lion International Films/The Criterion Collection]) Screen capture

The sequence entails ten consecutive shots in which the character of Lelia says goodbye to her brother Hugh at the bus station. The sequence lasts only one minute, but within that time the cuts (and they are all cuts, no dissolves) within the scene appear to observe the 180° system as governed by classical Hollywood rules (see Bordwell and Thompson, 1997: 285-287). However, two aspects of the scene jolt the viewer. The first is the duration of the shots. Looking at the relation between shot one and two, and shot two and three are shot lengths of seven and six seconds, respectively. Yet shot three lasts twenty seconds before cutting to shot four, which is then only two seconds before cutting to shot five. This arrhythmic structuring of shots refuses to settle the viewer into a pattern of editing that is 'feasible' within what is essentially a routine exchange between characters. Secondly, while the sequence of shots retains the 'axis of action' so that, for example, there is no shot from the point of view of the ticket-seller, the angle of each cut seems to play with the *idea* of continuity editing. The transitions between shots one, two and three move only a few degrees, while retaining Hugh's position on the left of the *mise-en-scene*, and Lelia's on the right. The effect of this is a perceived redundancy of editing; Cassavetes employing a method that only succeeds in drawing attention to the fiction. Against this, a traditional Hollywood model of this sequence would either film this as one continuous shot, or utilise shot-reverse-shot to orientate the viewer safely through this part of the exchange between the two characters, thereby rendering the editing 'invisible'. But against this, in a series of shifts that occur between shots five and eight, is an effect that should be even more jarring as it incorporates shots that see Lelia and Hugh apparently switch places in the *mise-en-scene* (with the ticket booth still behind them); but in fact works more transparently as each transition records a match on action (Lelia hugging Hugh: their physical contact serving to 'anchor' continuity). This scene thus shows how Cassavetes' simultaneous resistance to, and utilisation of technique makes it difficult for his cinema to be valued by any one school or aspect of criticism. Improvisation becomes visceral, as it forces the viewer to adopt an improvisatory attitude to the film, rather than accept the role of passive consumer.

<u>EXAMPLES</u>

In the following chapters, further sections of films by Cassavetes and Cronenberg will be described and interrogated as examples of the visceral in action. These final three chapters can be seen as related through their contextualising the visceral within particular aspects of film. Therefore the next chapter concentrates on the spaces within which written and spoken language occurs in the directors' *oeuvres*, while the final two chapters discuss films that negate the thrill of the spectacle and the meaning of urban environments, respectively. Unfortunately, not every Cassavetes and Cronenberg film can be included. Through the process of research certain films are found to be more eminently suitable than others. Cassavetes' *Husbands* and Cronenberg's *Videodrome*, for instance, have proved to be rich seams of visceral 'content,' while *Minnie and Moskowitz* and *eXistenZ* have proved less fruitful. If the particular emphases of the following chapters had been different (being less 'spatially' orientated, for instance), choosing to focus on, say, genre, then other films could well have been chosen.

With this in mind, in the next chapter we shall indeed explore the visceral in several examples from Cassavetes and Cronenberg's *oeuvres*, while simultaneously specifying semiology's role in interrogating the spatial environments within which the visceral inhabits.

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[1] Lowenstein (2005) offers an alternative reading of 'shock' based on Benjamin's conception of the crisis of modernity. The cinematic shock is here regarded as an anaesthetic to the daily, 'natural' shocks of modern, industrial life. It is "the vehicle for redeeming experience debased by modern shock in the first place" (27). Such a shock, represented on screen, affects viewers in many possible ways, and therefore "entails dangers as well as potential benefits" (16)

[2] Williams, too, sees the possibility of pornography as a limit-work following Barthes' definition, one that exists at the edge of understanding (2004b: 6). Certainly there are references to pornography in Cronenberg's work, with the inclusion of the *Samurai Dreams* segment in the special edition DVD release of *Videodrome*, a soft core short which is only fleetingly glimpsed in the main film. Marilyn Chambers, starring in *Rabid*, was most famous as a porn actress (notably in *Behind the Green Door*). Then of course there was the controversy over *Crash* which was deemed pornographic by the tabloid press

[3] We might say that process equals lists and image equals emptiness. These terms are discussed as facets of how Cassavetes and Cronenberg's films are seen to access the visceral as defined in this thesis, particularly in the following chapter, "Cassavetes and Cronenberg: Lists and Emptiness"

CHAPTER THREE

JOHN CASSAVETES AND DAVID CRONENBERG: LISTS AND EMPTINESS

<u>CASSAVETES, CRONENBERG AND THE DVD SPECIAL FEATURE</u>

The 2009 DVD premiere of John Cassavetes' 1970 film *Husbands* is an 'extended cut' of the version previously released on video and broadcast on terrestrial, satellite and cable channels.[1] The film that was hitherto made available to audiences through television broadcast and on 35mm print to be shown at Cassavetes retrospectives[2] is timed at 130 minutes; this newer DVD cut runs at 142 minutes. As Charity (2009) notes, however, this is far from the end of the story with regards to the film. Noting that there are "solid" extras[3] on this Sony release and that it would be "churlish to ask for more", Charity posits that the "true Cassavetes fan can only dream" of a complete edition of the film that includes

> the unpublished novel Cassavetes wrote during the long gestation of the film [...], the 154-minute cut that premiered at the San Francisco Film Festival in 1970; the four-and-a-half-hour version [*Husbands* actor Ben] Gazzara confesses was his favourite, or even the first edit [producer Al] Ruban did with *Kind Hearts and Coronets* cutter Peter Tanner, which apparently everyone loved, except the director. (87)

That there are several possible versions of the same film is an attribute of the coming of the home cinema revolution that has been exacerbated by the arrival of DVD and Blu-Ray formats. For example the cachet of *The Exorcist* (1974) is amplified by the release of "The version you've never seen" which contains scenes and shots missing from both the original theatrical version and those distributed for home entertainment. Perhaps the most striking example of this trend towards reinvigorating 'older' films for the mass audience is the case of *Blade Runner* (1982), a film that is currently available in five iterations, including the 1992 "Director's cut" and the 2007 "Final cut". While *Husbands* appears to conform to this pattern of revival through being 'extended', as it is not a mainstream film only those who know Cassavetes' work will notice that this edition is in any way different to the one

previously available; there is furthermore no indication on the DVD packaging other than in the technical specifications detailed on the back of the box that this is a 'fuller' version of the film: nowhere is it written that this is an extended cut. The indications are that this is not in any way a definitive or preferred edition, [4] but one that simply co-exists with the other possible versions, seen and unseen by the public, that are 'out there'. As each was edited contemporaneously, and each had its own supporters from within the filmmaking community that worked together to make it, there is no essential, final cut.

The simultaneity of many versions of the same film is fairly typical of the Cassavetes *oeuvre*. *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie* too exists in two versions (1976 and 1978), and the director's first film, *Shadows*, was released once in 1958, re-edited and re-released in 1959. This second cut is the version that is available. The first version certainly exists but its wider distribution rights have been denied by Cassavetes' widow, apparently at the request of her late husband who stipulated that the newer *Shadows* is the only one that should be seen.[5]

The separation of a single film into several versions that can be presented simultaneously requires certain conditions in order to be made possible, linked very much to the attitude of the director and his producers. The least important consideration in Cassavetes' case is finance. As Ruban recalls, and according to Kouvaros (2004) "in Cassavetes approach to filming, film stock is regarded as the cheapest commodity available to the director." (14.) So for *Husbands* "close to seven hundred thousand feet of film were used" (13).[6] Kouvaros observes that these figures and attitude towards the business of filmmaking "highlight the particular economies at work in Cassavetes' films." But when understood within the structures of the filming process "Cassavetes' practice of overshooting serves to blur the distinction between the work of revision undertaken by the actor and director prior to the arrival of the camera and the activity of performance that takes place in front of the camera." (14.) Ruban describes it thus:

> What would happen quite often is that the actor would hit something
> that evoked a response in us. I mean, he'd turn the story in a slightly
> different direction that was much better than what was originally
> scripted, and we'd follow that path and re-write the script to take that
> turn. (In Viera, 1992: 14; also Kouvaros: 13)

Thus the several versions of *Husbands* are made possible through the abundance of raw footage that is available. And this abundance of filmed footage is made possible through the director's approach to the process of filming; marked that is by "an extreme attentiveness to the unexpected surprises and discoveries that emerge during and because of the filming" (Kouvaros: 14).

It is possible to compare this approach to filmmaking and how the films themselves are presented to a public with Cronenberg's output, and particularly how his films are organised as DVD and Blu-Ray editions.[7] Whereas the multiple versions of Cassavetes' film can be posited as parallel 'events', neither one more important than those others that exist alongside it, the Cronenberg film is resolutely singular. And in the manner of the more standardised DVD approach, the materials that are featured as 'extras' are regarded as merely part of the archaeology of the film: they support the creation of a film as a reification of disparate elements. The film is regarded as complete, and the special features are used as evidence of how this 'completeness' came about. The extra feature, in other words, lays bare the artefacts that contribute to but are not part of the film; it unearths those aspects of the now-unified work that were stripped back and filtered out. The extra feature singles out those important but ultimately discarded objects of the creation ritual that help to deliver the film as final statement, as complete. So in the Cinema Reserve DVD release of *The Fly* (1986)[8] missing and alternative scenes are added on to the special features of a disc separate to the one on which the main film features; on the Criterion edition of *Dead Ringers* (1988)[9] there is a gallery of designs for the opening credit sequence and for the unique surgical instruments sculpted for the film; and the "Director Approved" special edition of *Naked Lunch* (1992)[10] has supplementary visual material on a second disc that traces the developing aesthetic of the fantasy creatures invented for the film.

These discretely positioned appendages to the main feature betray the messiness and chaos of artistic construction without explicitly impinging on the sanctified text. What the films suggest are an attempt at a singularity of purpose, without distractions. As observed by Mark Irwin, who was cinematographer on Cronenberg's films starting with 1979's *Fast Company* and ending with *The Fly*, Cronenberg consistently made the same film over and over again, "as if it was one

long project" (Mathijs, 2008: 5; also Lucas, 1983: 149). This aspect is easy to see: when one watches the films "back-to-back", as Mathijs suggests, "the similarities are striking." Within the context of film as utterly complete and reified, the anaesthetic coolness of the Cronenberg *mise-en-scene* (Mathijs notes it is consistently "Spartan" and "underlit") coupled with "formal arrangements [that] construct a sense of desolation and detachment" further encourages a reading of the fundamental 'art object'; one that has been stripped back to its essential – and only its essential – components (Mathijs: 5).

This rather crude analysis of the *oeuvres* of Cassavetes and Cronenberg through the implementation of the DVD special feature is nonetheless instructive of an attitude towards work, towards the techniques of filmmaking, and towards a philosophy of the image that is not only unique to each director, but allows them into those institutions within which they are seen to belong. Thus Cassavetes can be variously described as a guerrilla filmmaker, the instigator of a truly independent method of practice in American cinema, a perpetual outsider who did not pander to the masses, and so on. Cronenberg has developed into a far more considered director, concerned with the viability of every shot and moment, with the art and the completeness of the film as project.

Despite these polarities, the two directors are able to produce a visceral cinema. Indeed, it may be possible to state that because Cassavetes and Cronenberg are possessed by such differing creative motives they are able to affect the levels of meaning available in the cinematic image; and it may be the case that this facet of their individual cinemas is discerned as describing the extreme limits of the shape of the visceral in cinema. Yet what is worth investigating further here is the prospect that in their very different methods of delivery of the cinematic image they each achieve precisely the same effect on the way meaning is disavowed. In other words, both Cassavetes and Cronenberg are able to question the validity of the claim for the cinematic image as an undisputed conveyor of language. We can begin to investigate this claim by suggesting that Cassavetes and Cronenberg operate at two opposing aesthetic registers. One fills his films with huge amounts of extraneous detail. The other strips back detail to the point where little is left to be read by the viewer. We

may say, in brief, Cassavetes' approach to film aesthetics deals in *lists* while Cronenberg's espouses *emptiness*.

LISTS

> We hurl this formal warning to Society: Beware of your deviations and
> *faux-pas*, we shall not miss a single one.
> (Louis Aragon, et al: "Declaration of the Bureau de
> Recherches Surrealistes (1999 [1925]: 439))

It is worth rehearsing the major difference between Cassavetes and Cronenberg's cinema so that we may envisage an eventual parity in their consequence. How their divergent cinematic styles engender a convergence at the level of language so that meaning is effectively denied. To do this we will continue the analysis of the directors' films in relation to their special features; although the specific emphasis will be on the tension between the unified work of art and those ancillary materials that impose on its structures.

Regarding the initial schism between Cassavetes and Cronenberg as a starting point, but nonetheless one that will inform much of how the analysis of film language, and a certain strands of film language are applicable to discussing these two directors together, we may continue by stating that Cassavetes' cinema is concerned with allowing access to a greater number of variables and that Cronenberg's is committed to reducing them: theirs is a conflict concerned with the processes of essentialism and self-discipline.

To analyse these claims this chapter will further examine the apparent differences between *Husbands* in its known versions, while the DVD releases of *Crash* (1996), *The Fly* and *Naked Lunch* and the short film *At the Suicide of the Last Jew in the World in the Last Cinema in the World* (2007) will illustrate Cronenberg's focus on a cinema of essences. While the focus on three Cronenberg projects and only one by Cassavetes seems unbalanced, there is in fact balance through the implementation of what will hereby be revealed as an ongoing thesis: as Cassavetes is concerned by the greater number of eventualities made possible by the process of filmmaking, so is Cronenberg dedicated to stripping them back. The one example of Cassavetes' cinema will indicate his commitment to revealing the co-presence of multitudinous

possibilities, while the three films of Cronenberg discussed here will illustrate his directness of purpose.

Husbands follows a trio of friends – men all in their early forties – after a fourth member of their circle has died. Beginning with a montage of family photos (the only time we see the missing friend, Stuart (played by David Rowlands)) and a funeral, the film can certainly be read as an extended portrayal of the act of mourning. These primary images, the first set static but full of life (the four friends laughing beside a pool, comparing muscles in an ostentatious parody of the aesthetics of Charles Atlas or Mr Universe contestants) and the second in full motion but among the articles of death (gravestones, black formal wear, a monotone eulogy spoken by a priest) set up the overriding feeling of mortality that extends across the film. For it is true that although the beginning moments of *Husbands* portray an (undisclosed) occasion that is full of joy and boisterous fun, its recollection through the photographic family album reveals automatically that this is time that has already passed. This facet of the photographed image is discussed by both Andre Bazin in "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" and Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida*: when we witness the photograph, we are face to face with death. Bazin envisages this as indicative of a "mummy complex" (1967: 9): "photography does not create eternity, as art does, it embalms time, rescuing it simply from its proper corruption" (14). For Barthes, the photographed object exists only in a time 'that-has-been' and is fatally unobtainable to the observer of the photograph (Barthes, 1981: 85).[11]

These critical observations on the coalescence of the image as it emerges through the photograph coincide with the propensity for Cassavetes' cinema to attempt to 'open out' the possibilities of the medium. In the first part of *Camera Lucida* Barthes writes that, "As *Spectator* I was interested in Photography only for 'sentimental' reasons; I wanted to explore it not as a question (a theme) but as a wound: I see, I feel, hence I notice, I observe, and I think." In arriving at a critical juncture, "the moment of reaching the essence of Photography in general [I,] "instead of following the path of a formal ontology (of a Logic), I stopped, keeping with me, like a treasure, my desire or my grief". Barthes could not let go of what photography meant to him: all those aspects of the photograph that he felt would need to be relinquished in order to analyse it: "desire, repulsion, nostalgia, euphoria"; those

elements that contribute to photography's "power" and its "*affect*". Cassavetes is also unwilling to turn away from the pain that cinema is capable of inducing. While there are fundamental, ontological differences between photography and cinema (which shall be discussed elsewhere)[12] the important aspect here is that, while in many ways the image can be dissected as "a whole network of essences",[13] the *affect* is something that both critic and filmmaker find, or desire to find, is "irreducible". (1981: 21.)

Within the scope of filmmaking, Cassavetes, in opposition to the rules by which mainstream (meaning Hollywood) films operate, refuses to be reductionist, and so, like Barthes, attempts to retain cinema's capacity to evoke desire and grief. He does this by expanding, rather than conflating incidents beyond their natural filmic lifespan. What the audience witness in a Cassavetes film is what Kouvaros, in a beautifully succinct phrase observes as "before the scene and after it has finished" (2004: 81). Thus, as Maria Viera (1990) writes in her discussion of the director's film *Faces* (1968), Cassavetes

> prefers not to elide time. The situations of his characters tend to work
> themselves out in real time. *Faces* is made up of eight long scenes with
> a story time of two hours, taking place late one night and roughly half
> an hour the next morning [...] This is one of the reasons Cassavetes'
> films do not produce pleasure for those whose expectations are that a
> film shows only those things that are 'important,' that move the narrative
> forward, with all other action eliminated. (13)

While it is therefore possible to examine the opening minutes of *Husbands* as a 'network of essences' that signify grief and mourning, alongside indications of vintage through the quality of film stock or the fashions in hairstyles and clothing (particularly of the women), the film's ultimate success lies in its ability to induce a physical reaction in its audience. In response to Columbia studio's insistence that he shorten the 142-minute version of the film, Cassavetes resisted: "I won't make shorthand films because I don't want to manipulate audiences into assuming quick, manufactured truths. If I had my way *Husbands* would be twice as long as it is and everyone could walk out if they wanted to"[14] (In Charity, 2009: 87). The expanded scenes in Cassavetes' films cannot be boiled down to essences: "what we are presented with is an expenditure of energy and film stock that contributes little to our

understanding of the characters, their motivations, or their problems." (Kouvaros, 2004: 98.)

The tendency for Cassavetes' films to extend beyond the limits of what may be regarded as sufficient for narrative purposes is exemplified by the twelve minutes of extra footage that have been added to the 130-minute cut of *Husbands*. Unlike other 'Final' or 'Director's' cuts, which spread the additional sequences across entire films, creating a nuanced change of dramatic and aesthetic focus that effect the entire piece, the twelve minutes extra in *Husbands* appears in one place, effectively expanding a sequence which had hitherto already been regarded as too long. It occurs early in the film. As Charity describes it,

> The restored twelve minutes all come from the same sequence, the climax of a notorious barroom wake in which three friends, Gus, Harry and Archie (John Cassavetes, Ben Gazzara and Peter Falk), orchestrate a drunken singing contest in honour of their misery. Even in the shorter version this sequence plays for an emotionally bruising twelve minutes, but in the original cut it's twenty minutes, with the three men ganging up mercilessly on one actress (Leolo Harlow) whose singing displeases them. The scene is only brought to a stop by Red Kullers' moving rendition of "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?" [...] The additional [four] minutes come from the next scene, in the men's urinal, and chiefly consist of Gus and Archie's grotesquely loud evacuations.

These, then, are the minutes cut by Columbia: "It's easy to see why," Charity concedes, "both on grounds of taste and simple frustration." (87.) It is worth reiterating here that even though these minutes have been restored, to suggest that in any way this is a 'Director's Cut' or 'Definitive Edition' would only serve to misunderstand Cassavetes' antagonistic purpose:

> A lot of people got uptight about the scene in which Peter and I vomit in the men's room of a bar. The characters weren't vomiting just because they happened to be drunk; they got drunk so they could vomit – vomit for their dead friend. Some people may find that disgusting, but that's their problem. When somebody dies, I want to feel something. I want to be so upset that I could cry, throw up, feel the loss deeply. If that offends some people, then let them be offended. I was watching television one night and the news come on and it said 500 people in Cleveland got up and left the theatre, *en masse*, and the name of the picture was *Husbands*. [*Laughs*] I could only laugh at that because I thought, "Jesus, what did that contain that could affect them so?!" I'm such an optimist. I think, isn't that marvellous that you could make a picture that can scare 500 people out of the theatre without having a moment of violence, a moment of anything that would be any way near controversial. Just the idea that people behaving in a way that is not

acceptable can take 500 people and throw them out of the theatre! Now, I've been bored with pictures, so if it's a boring picture I just sit there and at a certain point I say, "Let's go," but I won't get up and leave with 500 people because it's boring, so it must be doing something else to an audience. (Cassavetes, 2001: 256)

Here, Cassavetes' anecdote about the unambiguous rejection of his film implies the audience are responding to the excessive aspects of the scene: not simply that the characters are vomiting, but that the scene in which the vomiting occurs continues past the threshold of the audience's endurance.[15] In Barthes' terminology with regard to the power and affect he wants to retain when looking at a photograph, Cassavetes' cinema has, for the unacquainted viewer, *too much* 'desire, repulsion, nostalgia, euphoria'. Under the aegis of Cassavetes' filmmaking, then, it is possible to connect the temporal expansion of the image to a more theoretical conception of expansion as it appertains to the *affect* the cinematographic (and photographic) image engenders in the spectator.

Barthes' is not alone in espousing the affective power of images in a critical context. Indeed, alongside *Camera Lucida*, Bazin's "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" extols the intrinsic worth of photography "as a moulding, the taking of an impression, by the manipulation of light." (1967: 12) Bazin here is comparing the photographic image to the ancient art of the death mask, but in order to separate the photograph's affective power from those of the older, plastic arts, he is at pains to stress that a "very faithful drawing may tell us more about the model but despite the promptings of our critical intelligence it will never have the irrational power to bear away our faith."[16] (14.) Both Barthes and Bazin agree: there is something intangible and irrational about the photographic image. As Cassavetes states, for 500 people to leave a screening of *Husbands*, the recorded image must be 'doing something else' to them.

What this 'something else' is can be discovered in the theoretical roots that inform both "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" and *Camera Lucida*: Sartre's *L'Imaginaire* (1940). This connection can be established following Dudley Andrew's (2005b; 2010) discovery of notes written by Bazin that plainly state his essay was written with *L'Imaginaire* in mind; whereas Barthes, more explicitly, dedicates *Camera Lucida* to Sartre's book.

L'Imaginaire's importance to Bazin and Barthes' affective approach to the photographic image lies in its general theme: a philosophical treatise on the irreconcilable relationship between perception and imagination, prefiguring the greater existentialist observations, tracts and novels that were to come. It is a volume still very much informed by Sartre's reading of Husserl's phenomenology. In those pages Sartre maintains

> we can never perceive a thought nor think a perception. They are radically distinct phenomena. In a word, the object of perception constantly overflows consciousness; the object of an image is never anything more than the consciousness one has of it; it is defined by that consciousness: one can never learn from an image what one does not know already. (2004 [1940]: 10.)

For Sartre, then, the photographic image has no irrational power; there is no 'something else' that lies beyond our imagination. Sartre condemns this as an "essential poverty" that may be attributed to the photographic image, as it can to any product of the imagination.

Bazin in particular attempts to refute this conflict between imagination and perception by suggesting that, regardless of how we view other art-forms, the medium of the photograph is at last able to reconcile these two states. It is why he declares photography "clearly the most important event in the history of plastic arts." (1967: 16.) This is an aspect of Bazin's philosophy in "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" that is located by Lowenstein (2007): "Bazin ascribes to the photograph the very power that Sartre denies it: the power to reveal to the viewer something about the world that the viewer neither knows through imagination nor can know through perception." (55.) As perception is advanced "as our sensual observation of an object in the world, and imagination as our mental representation (or quasi-observation) of such an object" (Lowenstein, 2007: 55; also Sartre, 2004: 10) Bazin appropriates this to the viewer's experience of the photograph "by uniting mechanical objectivity with affective subjectivity." So, in the world of photography and the cinema, perception is allied both to the objective, optical facts that are the mechanisms of the human eye and to the "impassive" eye of the camera; while imagination describes the emotional response to this reality newly revealed through photography. It is here phenomenological conflicts are resolved: "For Sartre, when one detects true life or expression in a photograph, it is due solely to the viewer's

input; for Bazin the photographic experience that reveals the world anew is forged between the camera's contribution and the viewer's contribution" (Lowenstein: 55; also Bazin, 1967: 13-16).

Lowenstein identifies this commitment to the unexpected power of the photograph as the influence of surrealism on Bazin's theories of how 'realism' is characterised; the "formulation" of which "emerges [...] where the rational and the irrational meet." (57.) This observation is useful in that it rescues Bazin from the critical assessment that his thinking is entirely informed by an obsession with the cinema's adherence to verisimilitude. Lowenstein, with this in mind, writes it thus: "Bazin must be understood not as the naive realist he is so often mistaken for, but as a complex film theorist whose work reminds us of the realism within surrealism, and reveals to us the surrealism within realism." (59.) The idea of realism as being irrational as much as it is rational also helps to problematise the term 'realism' so that its meaning, particularly with regard to photography, is not taken as clear, untenable, or incontrovertible. Thus Lowenstein suggests that Bazin was thinking of Breton when he endeavoured to combine perception with imagination: "I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a surreality, if one may so speak" (Breton, 1999 [1924]: 432-439; Lowenstein: 56).

This faith in the surrealist project as offering a critical understanding of photography's unexpected power applies also to Barthes' analysis of the medium. So, while Barthes certainly sees himself as a realist, his own view of what constitutes reality is inflected through both a perceptual and an imaginary lens: "The realists, of whom I am one [...] do not take the photograph for a 'copy' of reality, but for an emanation of past reality: a magic, not an art" (1981: 88).

It is worth pointing out at this point that the apparent conflation of photography and cinema is itself a reductionist evaluation of the separate but interconnected ontologies of these media. How photographs are both like and not like moving images will be tackled more thoroughly in the chapter on special effects. For the moment, particularly with Bazin and Barthes in mind, it will suffice to note that both photography and cinema are deemed to possess an equal power: "to show [the viewer] something he did not already imagine and to feel something he could not

have [otherwise] accessed" (Lowenstein, 2007: 60). Both Bazin and Barthes' theories may be summarised as foregrounding the viewer's relationship to the still or moving photographic image: "For Bazin, the world reveals itself to the viewer through the photograph; for Barthes, the viewer is revealed himself in the affect triggered by the photograph. In both cases, the network of relations connecting the viewer and the world is enlarged – in the encounter between photograph and viewer, some new form of knowledge, affect, sensation, and/or revelation is added to the world." (60-61.)

The affect that is expressed through these two converging philosophies is the visceral: something hidden from rigorous, analytical explanation but is nonetheless present in the photographic (or cinematographic) image. This affect, after Bazin and Barthes, is an affective enlargement; and it is this concept of enlargement that can be regarded as integral to understanding Cassavetes' cinema.

Husbands is of course enlarged in a temporal sense: there are expanded versions of the film, both actual and potential; and of those that are available the sequences that are longer are easily locatable. Furthermore, in a strategy that can be detected across Cassavetes' directorial work, even those sequences that are not extended in the longer version of *Husbands* continue beyond their logical conclusion; beyond the point, to quote Antonioni, when "everything seems to have already been said" (in Rohdie, 1990: 53; also see Kouvaros, 2004: 99). It is in this way possible to equate the lengthening of sequences in *Husbands* with the idea of enlargement as indicative of the new affect that the viewer experiences while watching them: in being offered more information than the narrative is able to hold, the viewer is party to both the naked, ontological fact of the image, and with the irrational excesses of a sequence that appears to be 'going nowhere'. In this way the techniques of the Cassavetes film can be likened specifically to the surrealist idea of automatism and the spontaneity of artistic practice, and more generally to the modernist/avant-garde conception of autonomy.

Nonetheless it is worth keeping in mind Barthes' testimony that photography is more magic than art, and to remember Adorno's statement that "the autonomy of the work of art, and therefore its material form, is not identical with the magical element in it." (1999 [1936]: 521.) This would certainly make sense with regard to film, as whatever autonomy is developed through the process of filming is negated through the

judicious practice of editing. As interpreted by Leslie (2007) Adorno is stating that "Aesthetics and art were annexed to the development of the human sensorium": "tactility, the ability to touch, was a sensuous concept that related the new art [of cinema] to the physical presence of the collectively receiving mass body." (171.) This appears to be the case with the audience reception to *Husbands*: a mass body responding physically, and entirely negatively to the images presented to it.

Hence the instinct that may predominate in the shooting of a Cassavetes' scene is offset by the wilful construction of the edited film. This is verified by Cassavetes' own statements, quoted above, that suggest what Charity observes as a "wider strategy of provocation and disruption." (2009:87.) In this way Cassavetes' own links to the avant-garde can be viewed as emblematic in his philosophy that very much informed his aesthetic. Cassavetes, for sure, confirms that his first film, *Shadows*, "was an experiment all the way" (Cassavetes, 1961: 7), but as he developed as a director, this experimentation became part of this wider strategy of provocation. It is possible to identify a correlation between the philosophies that are apparent in how Cassavetes' work is constructed and those of contemporary avant-garde filmmakers. On Andy Warhol's early films, such as *Eat* or *Blow Job* (both 1963) Paul Sharits (who was also an avant-garde filmmaker) writes,

> Warhol has demonstrated in his early work that prolongations of subject (redundant, 'non-motion' pictures), because they deflect attention finally to the material process of recording-projecting (e.g., to the succession of film frames, and by way of consciousness of film grain, scratches and dirt particles, to the sense of the flow of the celluloid strip) [...] is perhaps as revealing of the 'nature of cinema' as is consistent interruption of 'normative' cinematic functions. (1972: 31.)

Don McDonagh, reviewing the experimental dance film, *Terrain* (1963) notes "It was blunt, honest, puzzling, at times wearisome and, most importantly, it was different. Different because it wanted to pose a direct challenge to custom and didn't have the time to be subtle or polite" (1976: 447). In both these cases of avant-garde practice, prolongation and directness are paramount to how these films are seen as 'different'; which in the Bazinian and Barthesian context can be read as meaning an enlargement of the viewer's visceral engagement with the world of the film. Such aspects of cinema that enable the viewer's access into unknown territories –

prolongation, redundancy, bluntness, honesty, impoliteness, puzzlement, difference –
are terms that are entirely appropriate to Cassavetes' films.

So why should the additional footage in *Husbands* stand out as an example of how
film expands the viewer's world experience? More importantly, how does this
experience become a visceral experience for the viewer, by which we may mean one
that is so affective it forces that viewer to stop watching? Kouvaros, as previously
mentioned, writes that the Cassavetes scene tends to start before and end after its
dramatic impetus is discovered. As an example he cites a moment in *Love Streams*
(1984) in which one character, Sarah, asks another, a taxi driver, about whether he
thinks she is as 'crazy as a bed-bug': "Cassavetes keeps the camera focused on the
cab driver after Sarah has moved out of the frame and long after his initial bewildered
response has been registered." Here, then is a scene that has not been trimmed back,
that communicates only "an expenditure of energy and film stock that contributes
little to our understanding of the characters, their motivations, or their problems"
(Kouvaros, 2004: 98). *Husbands*, however, goes further: even in its shorter cut, at no
part of the film's singing contest is the audience offered anything like narrative
progression or character insights; so in its longer form that it is this scene that is
extended can be interpreted as a perverse act of indulgence, that for the spectator is
both "emotionally bruising" and "maddening" (Charity, 2009: 87).

While the controversial sequence in *Husbands* is framed within the context of a
singing contest, the singing itself has none of the drama of competitiveness about it.
The *mise-en-scene* is comprised of a long table around which Archie, Harry and Gus
are gathered, ostensibly as judges, with several others, the contestants. The room is
extremely dark, lending the ensemble a *chiaroscuro* high contrast severity. While
other details are discernible, such as a high window, the exact dimensions of the
room in which these people sit is entirely indiscernible. Charity calls this sequence a
"barroom wake", and the jugs and glasses of beer that litter the table certainly imply
this is the location, yet its darkness give the appearance that this event is occurring in
a void. This is appropriate as the scene itself takes place outside of any temporal
logical sequence: it neither alludes to what has come before, nor foregrounds what
will come. Here is a sequence that is dropped seventeen minutes into the film,

remains for twenty minutes, and is then forgotten or ignored as a potential narrative device.

Characterising the sequence as a wake of course applies a degree of motivation to it: Archie, Harry and Gus are still dressed in the black attire they wore to Stuart's funeral at the beginning of the film; while both the act of singing (even as listeners) and the consumption of alcohol can easily be construed as part of the denial and "panicked regression" the trio undergo when faced with the fact that is their own mortality (87). Yet even with this explanation, and the expectation that this is what the scene is 'about', the implication that this is all a part of mourning is discarded within the first few seconds. The first shot of the scene is, in fact, a minute and thirty seconds long, and is intimately framed: the three friends are viewed together, seated behind the table in a medium shot. Other people are there, mostly older women who will each have a turn to sing. But also included in this first shot are two men who are standing behind Archie, Harry and Gus. Barely lit in the darkness of the *mise-en-scene* makes these figures barely discernible but ominous, while other upright and silhouetted figures who are placed directly in front of the camera obstruct the action at certain points as the camera slowly and erratically moves from left to right. Within this melancholy aesthetic, the first action performed is applause, and a toast: not for the dead Stuart, but for someone named Joe, who is not alluded to directly by the camera or the other characters. As is implied by the subsequent few minutes, Joe is being toasted for his singing: the audience, in other words, is jolted by the unfamiliarity and the contradictory meanings this sequence automatically encourages.

Cassavetes, of course, is himself happy to instil meaning on this sequence: the bathroom scene that follows the contest, containing two minutes of Archie and Gus loudly vomiting and farting in the toilet cubicle is a manner of expressing grief, by which the act of getting drunk is a method of inducing the physical discomfort and pain that is the only way these "benumbed bourgeois" men are able to discover the emotional suffering associated with loss. This is one interpretation of the experiences of the characters within the film; however, the suffering of the audience, as they are confronted with the prolonged sequence, has less to do with empathy for the predicaments of these characters than with a bodily awareness that what is being unfurled here is a sequence that has gone on too long. The construction of the *mise-*

en-scene, its characters huddled in the fathomless darkness of an unspecified interior space, and the positioning of the camera always outside the dynamics of the boisterous interplay to the point where the audience is blocked by the bodies of those people who are involved, offers a clandestine view of this *tableau*, but not a privileged one. The impression that the spectator has arrived too late to fully understand what is going on, and is being wilfully excluded from the 'sense' of the scene is a worrying concept. This is the case even with the close-ups: heads are turned away, not in the manner of a shot-reverse-shot that allows the viewer to interpret the words of the speaker (or in this case, singer) by picking up the facial response of her audience, but with complete disregard of how the spectator can read meaning into the words that are espoused. This is because the words themselves are thoroughly rehearsed as cultural objects: they are popular songs that have existed for a generation.

Cassavetes' penchant for the expanded scene is a terrifying concept because it presents the viewer with potentially endless variations on a single theme. This is true, for sure, throughout *Husbands*. There are references to this early in the film. Following the funeral, the three men are on a subway train. After Gus recounts a brief anecdote about how he could have been a great basketball player but for the fact that he was too short, there is a brief pause. Then Archie breaks into a soliloquy naming all the sports he loves: "I love baseball, I love golf, I love pool, I love track, I love ping-pong, I love volleyball, I love badminton..." In a six minute sequence after the subway scene, the catalogue of favourite sports continues visually with the trio engaged in many forms of play: they tag and shove each other on the street, have a walking race, play basketball in a gymnasium and swim. Directly after this is the singing contest. How these activities are linked are through their arbitrariness: no one is ever seen to win these traditionally competitive games; and their juxtapositions are effectively a string of non sequiturs. They are lists, random and largely unpredictable. Sontag (2000 [1982]) defines the list as "the whimsical aesthete polyphony that juxtaposes things and experiences of a starkly different, often incongruous nature, turning them all, by this technique, into artefacts, aesthetic objects" (xxvi).

However, in the post-phenomenological forging of the contributions of camera and viewer, the hidden or obscured aspects of Cassavetes' cinema – narrative, character, motivation – extend to the list, which is no longer whimsical or playful, but frighteningly compulsive. The viewer is undoubtedly given something new to experience, but its relentlessness is overpowering. The repeatability of the film *Husbands* in ever-lengthening versions offers a meta-textual version of this impulse towards creating a complete entity that is never achieved; but within the film itself the songs that extend the temporal length of the singing contest sequence threaten to go on endlessly. Simply by being songs creates the impression that the contest's duration could be indefinite.

The age of the contestants in this sequence dictates, somewhat, the vintage of the songs that are offered for consideration by Archie, Harry and Gus. Not in the sense that each individual is exemplary of the original demographic the song's composers would have targeted, but simply that these songs are old, and so are the people singing them. In the timeless void of the singing contest, Cassavetes' technique evokes the philosophical trope of Endless Recurrence, which appears in Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1885); but may more enticingly be attributed to the Greek Philosophical Tradition,[17] in which "eternal return reveals an ontology uncontaminated by time and becoming", borne from a need to "satisfy their thirst for the 'ontic' and the static": "for, from the point of view of the infinite, the becoming of things that continually revert to the same state is, as a result, implicitly annulled and it can even be affirmed as 'the world stands still'" (Eliade and Trask, 1974: 89).

The world stands still, but certain moments in its history are foregrounded: "This is First World War," one woman declares, before singing "When It's Apple Blossom Time in Normandy." Another belts out "Pack Up Your Troubles"; and in a petty game of one-upmanship, the two compete for the attention of the room by singing these songs simultaneously. The layering over of language in this way re-iterates the obstinate pointlessness of this sequence; its determination to play with time within the construct of film. The eternal return is in this way a Borgesian construct (as in "The Secret Miracle"), one that imagines "centuries that seem minutes and seconds that seem years"; part of, that is, what may be called, after the themes of Borges'

short stories in *Labyrinths*, Cassavetes' own "private metaphysics" (Maurois, 2000: 12, 9; also Borges, 2000 [1962]: 118-124).

The unwillingness to divulge exactly what his private metaphysics is, invests the sequence with its power. It can be read as an attack on sentimentality that typifies his *oeuvre*. *A Child Is Waiting* (1963), made under the aegis of Hollywood and Stanley Kramer Productions, was re-edited by the studio after Cassavetes' involvement as director was completed. The film was set extensively in an institution for mentally handicapped children. According to Cassavetes, the film-as-shot and the film-as-released demonstrated two very different liberal philosophies: "The difference in the two versions is that Stanley's picture said that retarded children belong in institutions and the picture I shot said [that they] could be anywhere, any time, and that the problem is that we're a bunch of dopes, that it's our problem more than the kids'." (Cassavetes, 2001: 123.) As in *Husbands*, Cassavetes' refusal to exploit close-ups in *A Child Is Waiting* reduces the sentimentality, which was what the studio eventually achieved, and was the edition of the film that was released (124).

Of course the songs in *Husbands* contest are, in themselves, sentimental. This is even more evident in the context of being sung by people who evidently have some attachment to the lyrics. The men who donate their voices to the occasion – in particular Red Kuller, who croons the Depression-era ballad, "Brother, Can You Spare A Dime?" – sing songs that are redolent with themes of loss and longing. In themselves, then, this fusion of singer and song has a certain resonance, but Cassavetes' assertion of optical and narrative distance affords this combination the aesthetic of the artefact, as mentioned by Sontag above.

Cassavetes' aesthete polyphony, whether it is the threat of the scene's indefinite expansion through the collection of songs that are stripped of their emotional meaning or the polysemy of 'cinematic objects' that are listed under the title *Husbands*, can be compared to a certain trend in museum curatorship that Giuliana Bruno (2007) dubs the "sentimental journey". Typified – "at the outbreak of modernity" – by Xavier de Maistre's *Voyage Around My Room* (1794) it assembles the "seemingly banal, ephemeral apparel of daily life. The rarities of this collection are ordinary objects: objects cherished and touched by hands no longer living; used things that have no more use; belongings that no longer belong." When the visitor

encounters this "personal museum", he "experiences the spectacle of things that carry no value other than emotional power – objects transformed into narratives by way of *emotion*." (133.) In this way the personal is made universal; objects that in being passed into the public view are granted additional sentimental power by their mundane-ness and their ubiquity. Cassavetes' museum of bodies and song are the negative reflection of this spectacle: an outpouring of emotion that is decontextualised for the observer by its existence outside the logic of a greater narrative and spatial contiguity.

The power of *Husbands*' singing contest is not locatable in its meaning, nor in the language of its characters but in what Bazin and Barthes agree is an evidentiary co-existence: "the image of an object [as] both its rational concreteness and its irrational essence" (Lowenstein, 2007: 58). In this context, the sequence can be read as "subjunctive", a simultaneity of "where you might have been or could be or might wish to go" and may describe both the content of the sequence itself and the audience's relationship to it (Bruno, 2007: 317). This can be best exemplified by the subtle distinction between Bazin and Barthes' theories of the photographic image: "For Bazin, the world reveals itself to the viewer through the photograph; for Barthes, the viewer is revealed himself in the affect triggered by the photograph. In both cases, the network of relations connecting the viewer and the world is enlarged – in the encounter between photograph and viewer, some new form of knowledge, affect, sensation, and/or revelation is added to the world" (Lowenstein, 2007: 60-61). The new affect comes from the subjunctive dimensions of the singing contest, which pictures sentimentality without projecting it on to the viewer. The viewer's world is concomitantly enlarged through being faced with something that should invoke an emotional response, but is resistant to such affective communication. Its emotion is there, but it is buried, linked to that unobtainable quality that Barthes finds in certain photographs: "desire and mourning" (1981: 21).

In such a way, Cassavetes' tries to verbalise this in his explanation of why his characters are forced to vomit in the scene immediately following the singing contest: it is the manner by which these characters are able to feel something. The drunkenness that can be sourced through even a cursory glance of the *mise-en-scene* is both a valediction and a purging in this way. Yet the method of address, which

bars the viewer's involvement in the sequence, adds a greater level of discomfort for the viewer than is evidenced by what is seen and heard, which is only augmented by Cassavetes' insistence on the repetitions of character actions, such as singing and vomiting. This hidden aspect of the image therefore exists outside of what the viewer would find unpleasant about singing or (more likely) vomiting: it is an aspect of the image that "shows no preference for morality or good taste" and can be detected equally in both the singing contest and the scene of bathroom vomiting that succeeds it (43).

As previously stated, the positioning of the singing contest in *Husbands* in both its shorter and longer forms can be seen as subjunctive, yet for the ways in which it can offend the viewer, it can more accurately be described as indicative. While subjunctive and indicative can be seen as somewhat contradictory terms in written and spoken language, with regards to the visual and temporal discourse between film and viewer that takes place in *Husbands*, taken together they are more than adequately able to describe why the untranslatable experience of the singing contest and its aftermath is unappealing to the viewer. In this way the subjunctive serves to describe the conditions through which *Husbands* is discrete from narrative and character contiguity; while the indicative can identify how it is able to offend.

Most lucidly defined by Jacques Derrida in *Speech and Phenomena* (1973 [1967]), the indicative (or indication) can be seen as antithetical to intention. Intention is meaning, and it is expression; and while it can be argued that Cassavetes' intent is nakedly visible on the screen in the sequence from *Husbands* (such as in the intent to portray drunkenness as a wilful catalyst to vomit) the "intention to mean" is only half the equation here. Through the experience of watching this sequence from *Husbands* what is absent is meaning; what the audience perceives is an indication of people singing, getting drunk and vomiting, but the intention is lost in the structuring of the scene: the non-specificity of place, the positioning of the camera at inopportune angles to the 'action' and the sense of being plunged into a situation that disorients the audience's understanding of when this event is happening. Indication, in this way, is revealed an image that can be authenticated as a gathering of people performing a variety of actions, but has "no animating intention which infuses life into the body" (Kamuf, 1991: 6). The unobtainable meaning that Barthes identifies as

desire and mourning occurs not because this is a scene that can be described as a wake, but because for all its indications of life, it resolutely resists any thorough interpretation. Derrida writes it thus: "Indication is the process of death at work"; and in *Husbands* death is worked across the process of the film, and this sequence in particular. This sequence, in fact, can be equated with what Derrida names "the other", which can be described in general terms as constituting elements of exclusion deemed 'different' by the dominant forces in society. As applied to *Husbands*, the other refers to a manner of cinematic address that is regarded as transgressing the boundaries of morality and good taste (which Barthes identifies is evident in the affect engendered by the photograph's elusive quality). Derrida associates the other with indication, and therefore with a mode of address that lessens the viewer's confidence in the verities of (in this case) visual expression:

> Indication is the process of death at work [...] As soon as the other appears, indicative language – another name for the relation to death – can no longer be effaced. The relation to the other as nonpresence is thus impure expression. To reduce indication in language and reach pure expression at last, the relation to the other must perforce be suspended (1973 [1967]: 40)

What offends about *Husbands'* singing contest, then, is its impurity. It is other because it is a denial of pure expression. It is, in short, the anticipated death of meaning. Faced with this, the audience rejects the film in the manner Cassavetes observes above: so it is not violence or other outwardly controversial images that will cause an audience to leave a cinema; it is the blatant espousal of impure expression. The indicative – apropos the relation to death – and the subjunctive – the tendency for the film to empty time and space into a limitless and fathomless chamber – work together to create a visceral force that the audience, faced with its overwhelming power, are desperate to escape.

EMPTINESS

Someday we must write the history of our own obscurity (Barthes, 1982 [1970]: 4).

The viewer's access to the visceral evident in David Cronenberg's cinema is permitted through techniques entirely dissimilar to Cassavetes'. Whereas the older director expands time by implementing the aesthetic device of the list, Cronenberg's

typically much shorter films are reduced to essences. This comparison can be extended as far as the body of the script. As directors who also wrote screenplays, it is worth noting that Cassavetes' scripts extend far beyond the page-per-minute guidelines set out by Hollywood screenwriters, while Cronenberg's are much shorter. His *Crash*, a one hundred-minute film, is translated from a script that is merely seventy four pages. Cassavetes' *Husbands* is several hundred pages in length, testifying to his desire to capture as many possibilities during the creative processes of pre-production and production: writing and filming. Before a foot of film is shot, seemingly at the moment of conception, a Cassavetes or Cronenberg project is marked by its creator's individual notion of 'completeness'.

Cronenberg's stripping back to what we might call the 'details of cinema' is demonstrated through his films' relationships to their named sources. Unlike Cassavetes, many more of Cronenberg's films are adaptations of established works: *The Dead Zone* is a version of the bestselling Stephen King novel; *The Fly* a remake of Kurt Neumann's 1958 science fiction movie, itself freely revised from a George Langelaan short story; *M Butterfly* is from David Henry Hwang's stage play. Of Cronenberg's adaptation of J.G. Ballard's novel *Crash*, Iain Sinclair (2009) writes of the disparity between "the cryogenic elegance" of the film and the "urgent" prose of the book, "swarming with a maggoty life" (43): "Ballard, unlike Cronenberg, works himself into an incantatory frenzy through the Old Testament poetry of the list. Rhythms strain towards climax [...] mimicking Allen Ginsberg's [...] *Howl*."[18] (44.) It would be unwise to attempt to connect Ballard's list-making with Cassavetes' strategy as collector: *Husband's* progress is far too slow to be considered frenzied. Even so, just as Ballard's "'I think' riff", which Sinclair is referring to, bears a resemblance to Ginsberg's "who" in *Howl*, the aesthetic subjunctive (the timeless void of the 'wake') into which Cassavetes plunges the meaningless (that is, indicative) actions of his revellers is akin to the speculative realm of potentially endless incident that propels Ballard's and Ginsberg's invectives. Hence:

> I think of the crashes of psychopaths, implausible accidents contrived in stolen cars on evening freeways among tired office-workers. I think of the absurd crashes of neurasthenic housewives returning from their VD clinics, hitting parked cars in suburban high streets [...] (Ballard, 1973, in Sinclair, 2009: 44)

> I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness
> [...] who poverty and tatters and hollow-eyed and high sat up smoking in
> the supernatural darkness of cold-water flats floating across the tops of
> cities contemplating jazz [...] (Ginsberg, 1996 [1955]: 1598-1599)

Such is the structure of the Cronenberg *oeuvre* that such passion is part of the aesthetic that is stripped back. Not aesthetic, but anaesthetic:

> The value of *Crash* the film is easy to overlook [...] It belongs to a
> climate of pre-millennial boredom. It's a novella of the last days. It has
> to run for ever, hours and hours of road footage, centuries of sex without
> fertility or climax [...] I want to see *all* the out-takes, the wet dawn
> motorways, the yawning, shivering actors. That's the vision that has
> been tapped. Post-surveillance anti-drama. The death of excitement. A
> riposte to Hollywood's mega-budget prostitution of the senses. We
> have to learn to endure boredom to the point where egoless
> enlightenment can be achieved. (Sinclair, 2009: 57.)

The DVD release of *Crash* does not feature any of the extra footage that Sinclair wants to see. It is, however (as with Cronenberg's *The Brood* (1979)) available in two cuts for the US market: an NC-17 edition that was edited for content so that it could distributed wider than the director's preferred R rated version, which had a very limited theatrical release. As an example of film that is re-cut by the production company, this does not inhabit the environment of expansion that dominates the Cassavetes *oeuvre*.

However, Sinclair's observations about the film's ability to access a *zeitgeist* of apathy existent in the supermodern metropolis allude to an awareness of how stripped back *Crash* feels for the viewer. Whether this additional footage is available or not is beside the point: the achievement of what Ballard calls the film's "triumph" of "icy detachment" is that the film is a precise and palpable entity; the result of removing all but the essence of what will be the final product: the film entitled *Crash* (in Sinclair, 2009: 55).

Metaphors of disengagement predominate in critical studies of Cronenberg. Mathijs makes the observation, echoing Sinclair's distinction between the director's annulment of excitement and Hollywood spectacle, about the Cronenberg aesthetic: "cold and cool but not flashy or shiny" (2008: 5). It is an approach that extends to the performances. Of James Spader, who plays the Ballardian alter-ego in *Crash*, Sinclair writes that he "is a good enough actor to leave nothing in his face. It's

uninhabited, a cartoonist's flick of the wrist." This face, portraying nothing more than "complacent inaction" prevails in major roles throughout Cronenberg's cinema (2009:58). Lowenstein, indeed, suggests that this trait is so part of the perceived authorial signature it is inflected in the roles Cronenberg is offered as actor in other people's movies: "Cronenberg's acting roles tend to emphasise murderous embodiment or bureaucratic disembodiment, often to reveal a combination of both" (2004). Mathijs continues this idea: "Cronenberg is mostly cast as cold, methodic and rational, faculties the figures of the serial killer and the bureaucrat share (and which characterise the objectifying impersonal mode of address both are infamous for)." Of the parts Cronenberg plays in these films, Mathijs is explicitly referring to supporting roles, for example as "a stoic project manager in *Into the Night*; a psychotic doctor, in *Nightbreed*; a cheeky director, in *Trial by Jury*", and so on (Mathijs, 2008: 200).

Ballard postulates this inflected coolness as an anti-melodramatic commitment to the philosophy of the piece: "We are never propelled into action by the emotions of the characters"; "Emotion is kept down to the minimum – so that the ideology is allowed to turn the wheel of dramatic action." (In Sinclair, 2009: 55.) There is a provocatively Barthesian tone to this statement; the Barthes, that is, of *Mythologies* (1957).

Barthes' concept of myth is in this way synonymous with ideology (as discussed, for instance, by Brown, 1991: 24-38) as a method by which the dominant forces in a society promote the discourses that constitute that society as natural (Barthes, 2000 [1957]: 109, 110). Barthes' examples of how myth infiltrates society are many, but are by no means exhaustive: "not only written discourse, but also photography, cinema, reporting, sport, shows, publicity [...]" (110.) Barthes' characterisation of myth as dominant and ubiquitous therefore agrees with the classification of ideology as a means by which society manipulates the attitudes of the populace:

> A dominant power may legitimate itself by *promoting* beliefs and values congenial to it; *naturalizing* and *universalizing* such beliefs so as to render them self-evident and apparently inevitable; *denigrating* ideas which might challenge it; *excluding* rival forms of thought, perhaps by some unspoken but systematic logic; and *obscuring* social reality in ways convenient to itself. Such `mystification', as it is commonly known, frequently takes the form of masking or suppressing social conflicts, from which arises the conception of ideology as an imaginary resolution of real contradictions. (Eagleton, 1991:5-6)

The process of stripping back, which Ballard suggests allows Cronenberg's ideology to dominate *Crash*'s dramatic impetus, is reminiscent of Barthes' suggestion that "myth prefers to work with poor, incomplete images, where the meaning is already relieved of its fat [...] such as caricatures, pastiches, symbols, etc." (2000: 127). The diminution of character emotion to the level that would be projected by a masque can be viewed as Cronenberg's naked declaration of the power of the incomplete image, in which the actors are no more than symbols representative of the director's ideology. But behind the prevalence of images in his cinema, what precisely is Cronenberg's ideology? One possibility is to read it as promoting an atmosphere of scientific detachment: a trait that certainly dominates the director's belief in scientific reason in many of his films. For instance, in his commentary on *The Fly*, Cronenberg states his concerns about the scientific inaccuracies in the 1958 original, which shares the theme of the remake: a scientist who is fused with the metabolism of a fly during an experiment in teleportation. How, for example, can the scientist effectively become two entities; one human with the upscaled head and limb of a fly's; the other a fly with the downscaled head and arm of a human?[19] It is a logic that explores, to return to Borges, "possibility" (see Maurois, 2000: 10), and is dealt with entirely rationally, even to the point where the characters in Cronenberg's films, faced with the most horrifying biological changes, are entirely calm (as evidenced in, not only *The Fly*, but also *Shivers* (1974), *Rabid* (1976) and *Videodrome* (1982), among others).

However, as I see it, the ideology Cronenberg's films promote is not scientific detachment but the myth of the author. Sinclair certainly sees evidence of this in the casting, where each of the male leads in a Cronenberg film is a version of the director: "Cronenberg likes these alter egos, his vulpine wasters: stand-ins who, within the permissive register of cinema, can enact his darkest fantasies." (2009: 58.) Cronenberg himself confirms this in his remarks about the male leads in his films, beginning with James Woods in *Videodrome*: "Even though we don't look alike, Jimmy Woods' presence on the screen began to feel like a projection of me. It was exciting to find an actor who was my cinematic equal. I'd never really considered that as a possibility before" (In Rodley, 1997: 96). Cronenberg's films, then, become a scene wherein the vision of the director is deified above all other consideration in cinema. The same, of course, can be said for Cassavetes' *oeuvre*. This is a challenge

that shall be addressed elsewhere in these pages: how to separate the beliefs of the author and the ideology he endorses from the visceral, a force that has no respect for ideology. Nonetheless it is a process that begins here with Barthes' theories on myth. He begins the long essay that concludes *Mythologies*, "Myth Today", with the italicised assertion, "*myth is a type of speech.*" This, of course, introduces the idea of ideology as able to infiltrate all aspects of discourse, but more importantly here is the footnote he adds to this statement: "Innumerable other meanings of the word myth can be cited against this. But I have tried to define things, not words" (2000: 109). This is a defence that can be carried over into this chapter on the lists in Cassavetes' films and the emptiness that is prevalent in Cronenberg's work. Elsewhere the importance of the individual director's views on what his films are 'about' will be weighed against the visceral's tendency to escape easy definitions or meanings; but the current challenge is to define the environments within which the visceral can propagate, not question the relative validity of what a director thinks. It really is a matter of defining the things that constitute the visceral, not the words used by the author to justify its presence.

Ideology will therefore be regarded as the antithesis of the visceral, but it is worth noting that, in Cronenberg's case at least, the emptying out of emotion, presumably for the purposes of promoting an ideology can in fact be construed as a method by which the visceral is admitted into the film. Myth may well be synonymous with ideology, but as Barthes advances this theory in later writings, he informs his reader that the methods by which ideology should be analysed are not fixed, and must themselves be put under scrutiny. In an interview with Raymond Bellour in *Les Lettres francaises* in 1970, Barthes says, "I could no longer be content with relating forms to ideological contents as I did in *Mythologies*." Referring specifically to his study of 'Japan,' *Empire of Signs*, published contemporaneously to this interview, he states that while this is "an alteration, not a denial" of the need to interrogate ideology, he does admit the need for a shift in focus: "It is Western discourse as such, in its foundations and its elementary forms, that we must now try to break apart." (1985: 85.) Relating this change in focus specifically to the work of Cronenberg is a matter of not merely identifying the ideology at work in the films, but what discourse exists behind the ideology. Ballard sees the explication of ideology as the reason for Cronenberg's paring down of emotion in his films. While this is a tempting solution

to the problematic de-emphasis of passion in cinema, I would argue that what is achieved in the Cronenberg *oeuvre* is the surpassing of an absolute limit of representation, out of which is conveyed only emptiness.

Emptiness – the empty sign – is indeed the subject of Barthes' *Empire of Signs*. When he suggests in the interview with Bellour that the discourses of the West should be broken apart, he conceives of a society where meaning is eliminated. Of the book, *The New York Times* reviewer Edmund White, writes that Barthes has devised a land where "there is no terrible *innerness* as in the West, no soul, no God, no fate, no ego, no grandeur, no metaphysics, no 'promotional fever' and finally no meaning" (1983). This is Barthes' 'Japan',[20] a country whose name I have contained in quotation marks as it is a fabrication postulated precisely as a method of questioning the foundational principles of the West.

> If I wanted to imagine a fictive nation, I can give it an invented name, treat it declaratively as a novelistic object [...] so as to compromise no real country by my fantasy (though it is then that fantasy itself I compromise by the signs of literature). I can also – though in no way claiming to represent or to analyse reality itself (these being the major gestures of Western discourse) – isolate somewhere in the world (*faraway*) a certain number of features [...], and out of these features deliberately form a system. It is this system which I shall call: Japan [...] Hence Orient and Occident cannot be taken here as 'realities' to be compared and contrasted historically, philosophically, culturally, politically [...] To me the Orient is a matter of indifference, merely providing a reserve of features whose manipulation – whose invented interplay – allows me to 'entertain' the idea of an unheard-of symbolic system, one altogether detached from our own. (Barthes, 1983 [1970]: 3)

Barthes' unheard-of symbolic system is "*an emptiness of language*" (4) that the author finds in this fictive culture; so that the "task" of the *haiku* "is to achieve exemption from meaning within a perfectly readerly discourse". This is "a contradiction denied to Western art, which can contest meaning only by rendering its discourse incomprehensible". The *haiku*, then, "is neither eccentric nor familiar: it resembles nothing at all" (81). Cronenberg's stripping back of emotion, of the affective domain that other cinemas inhabit (Sinclair typifying Hollywood as promoting a mega-budget prostitution of the senses) may well be ideologically-motivated, but what is actually achieved is a cinema that obtains a certain exemption from meaning within the structures of a well-established cinematic discourse. Hence,

the emptiness that is found in the *haiku* corresponds to the emptiness in Cronenberg's films. Further, as implicit in Barthes' statements both on and in *Empire of Signs*, this emptiness can be seen to exist behind, or even before ideology; at the very least it is entirely separate from, and supersedes it. To return to Ballard's observation, ideology may well be perceived as turning the wheel of dramatic action in the Cronenberg film, but it is this emptiness that effectively erases its meaning. Barthes: "what is designated is the very inanity of any classification of the object: *nothing special* [...] the event is not nameable according to any species, its specialty short-circuits." (83-84.) What Barthes discovers in 'Japan', is here discovered in cinema, but under a different name: the visceral. It exists, but it exists only in the image behind the image that conveys ideology, which is itself behind the image that conveys meaning.

The visceral exists in sequences from both Cassavetes and Cronenberg's films. And, as with Cassavetes, the Cronenberg sequence can seem to extend beyond its natural limits. However, unlike Cassavetes, the sequence extends not through excessive activity and the replication of aesthetic objects united by certain themes (such as the songs in the singing contest); for Cronenberg it is through the emblematic emptiness that the visceral is permitted. *Crash*'s opening shot employs this emptiness declaratively, the camera gliding through a huge space, an aircraft hangar, towards Catherine Ballard and her lover, a flying instructor. The shot is "stately and voyeuristic in intent" (Sinclair, 2009: 46) but its coolness is inescapable: a sex scene "orchestrated as much for the camera as for the performers." (47.) The meaning that is informed by ideology, which could be labelled as 'adultery' (for those who already know the film) or 'depravity', nonetheless seeks no further ancillary explanation; an outcome that is enhanced by the scene's immediate succession by two other sex scenes. Cronenberg explains this by saying that these consecutively structured "sex scenes are *absolutely* the plot and the character development", but in clustering them, he effectively drains whatever erotic potential they otherwise would have: their specialty really does short-circuit (in Rodley, 1997: 191).

As with Cassavetes, Cronenberg's visceral cinema can be expressed through the constructs of indication and the subjunctive as opposed to intention, delineated by a resistance to meaning on one hand, and an avowal of meaning on the other. While

Cassavetes' films are highlighted as containing the largest amount of dramatic events and Cronenberg's are identified by their capacity to wilfully drain dramatic impetus, they each correspond to a certain, seemingly hidden, affect that renounces narrative cinema's desire to create meaning.

SEMIOTICS OR SEMIOLOGY?

Throughout this overview of how the emphasis on lists and emptiness in Cassavetes and Cronenberg's respective works, I have deliberately skirted around one methodological approach that has nonetheless haunted the theories alluded to in the previous sections of this chapter: the questions raised by film semiology. I refer, of course, to semiology rather than semiotics as the theorists and philosophers whose concepts have so far underpinned my arguments up to this point are united by works that are both indebted to, and critical of the linguistic theories of Ferdinand de Saussure rather than those of his contemporary, Charles Sanders Peirce. Hence Barthes, in his inaugural speech as the chair of semiology at the College de France: "It seemed to me that a science of signs could stimulate social criticism and that Sartre, Brecht, and Saussure could join forces in this project" (1982 [1978]: 471); and Derrida, on the foundations of his own philosophy of the co-relationship between absence and presence as interrogating the semiological theories that came before: "Let us cite Saussure only at the point which interests us" (1991 [1972]: 63). While Bazin does not reference Saussure directly, his writings, including "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" cited above, and "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema" (1967: 23-40) do manage to further progress the idea of film as language – a significant break from much of the theory that was being written by his contemporaries; and as Lowenstein discovers parity between Bazin and Barthes' ideas on the recorded image, the content of these writings correspond closer to a semiological analysis of film aesthetics.

The differences between the Saussurean approach and the Peircean approach to the study of 'sign systems' can be understood as separated by an attitude to signs as being either linguistic or non-linguistic. In the analysis of images as sign systems, it would seem that Peirce's semiotics is most suited to the purpose of cinema studies, and indeed it has been discovered by theorists as a most useful way of classifying the

many varieties of the moving image. Peirce conceives of the semiotic sign as part of a greater belief in pragmatism: a method of establishing objective meaning through observation and experiment, and in its exhaustive arrangement of categories of signs is able to more adequately discriminate between the many different ways visual objects 'mean'. There are, for instance, his logical taxonomies that include definitions of certain 'genres' of signs:

> There are three kinds of signs. Firstly, there are *likenesses,* or icons; which serve to convey ideas of the things they represent simply by imitating them. Secondly, there are *indications,* or indices; which show something about things, on account of their being physically connected with them. Such is a guidepost, which points down the road to be taken, or a relative pronoun, which is placed just after the name of the thing intended to be denoted, or a vocative exclamation, as "Hi! there," which acts upon the nerves of the person addressed and forces his attention. Thirdly, there are *symbols,* or general signs, which have become associated with their meanings by usage. Such are most words, and phrases, and speeches, and books, and libraries. (Peirce, 1894)

The increased significance of Peirce on film studies is concomitant with his influence on the philosophical film writings of Gilles Deleuze: "C.S. Peirce is the philosopher who went the furthest into a systematic classification of images [...] He necessarily associated with [semiotics] a classification of signs which is the richest and the most numerous that has ever been established." (Deleuze, 2005 [1986]: 71.)

Deleuze has latterly become a recognisable force in academia: his two-volume analysis of film as a sign-producing system informing readings of cinema's future (such as Martin-Jones' (2008) discussion of the efficacy of the Deleuzean method post 9/11) and just as crucially, its past (Dowd's (2009) reappraisal of Jacques Rivette through a Deleuzean lens). The temptation to utilise a Deleuze-inflected semiotics to uncover the visceral in cinema becomes even stronger as we realise his employment of Cassavetes as illustrative of his aesthetics echoes many of the observations we have already made about the director. Deleuze notes that Cassavetes "undo[es] space" through the "function of a face which is abstracted from spatio-temporal co-ordinates" (Deleuze, 2005: 124-125). This certainly emphasises the 'problem' of the eventless singing contest alluded to above, and in an echo of Kouvaros' succinct appraisal of the Cassavetes' sequence as existing before the scene and after it has finished, continues by stating that Cassavetes focuses on "an event which exceeds its actualisation in all ways, sometimes because it procrastinates and

dissolves, sometimes on the contrary because it comes into view too quickly." Finally, in ascertaining that in Cassavetes, "it is the empty space which is all of a sudden filled", Deleuze realises the tension between lists and emptiness that is the focus of this chapter.

It is however worth remembering the philosophical heritage to which Deleuze belongs; which includes not only Peirce's pragmatism, but the more dominant inspiration, Henri Bergson. Deleuze's Bergson is a philosopher of movement concerned with the relation between cinema and the reality it reproduces. In terms of how movement is recreated on a screen it is not "false" for "when the cinema reconstitutes movement with mobile sections [that is, still frames fed through a projector], it is merely doing what was already being done by the most ancient thought (Zeno's paradoxes), or what natural perception does." The importance of this philosophy of perception, which Deleuze extensively critiques, is that it is seen as a divergence from the phenomenological stance that witnesses "cinema as breaking with the conditions of natural perception." (Deleuze, 2005: 2.) As with Bazin and Barthes, therefore, Deleuze is offering his theory of cinema as informed by differences to the phenomenological project to which it nonetheless refers. Hence Rushton and Bettinson (2010):"for Deleuze, for the duration of the film, while I am watching it, while I am conscious of it, that film *is* the real world." (113)

As already revealed in the discussion of Bazin, Barthes and Cassavetes *vis a vis* Sartre's *L'Imaginaire*, their approach is distinct from Deleuze's. Deleuze, returning to Peirce, makes it "clear that the image gives rise to signs" (2005: 71) while Barthes and Bazin discover in the photographic image the power "to show [the viewer] something he did not already imagine and to feel something he could not have accessed without the photograph" (Lowenstein, 2007: 60). In other words, Deleuze's theory of cinema is "unapologetically aesthetic and classificatory" rather than "ideological" (Rushton and Bettinson, 2010: 113); whereas Barthes and Bazin are able to conceive of images that evade aesthetic enquiry through a challenge to the ideology of how film images should 'mean'; and can consequently interrogate those aspects of cinema that appear as hidden, unapproachable, visceral. As Andrew (2005a) writes of the relationship between Deleuze and Bazin as "thinker[s] obsessed with creating new concepts" he notes that "where Deleuze would champion self-

generating mathematical (and filmic) systems, Bazin [...] unswervingly developed a realist system. Like 'Euclid's straight line,' photographic reference serves as this system's first axiom: from it, the theorist may derive corollaries and far-flung hypotheses." (xii.) For Deleuze cinematic realism is taken 'as read'; for Bazin it is the very essence of his enquiry.

Saussure's linguistically-focused semiology is therefore much more attuned to an analysis of the visceral, eschewing categories in favour of a more malleable, dyadic relationship that conceives of the sign as containing a signifier that expresses a signified. The malleability of this idea of the sign is demonstrated by Barthes' re-evaluation of Saussure's semiology as being useful as an evaluative method outside of linguistics; it is a system of study capable of engaging with a more general "problem of meaning"; that is, the appeal of semiology is not simply as a science "content with meeting the facts", but as one that can "define and explore them as tokens for something else" (Barthes, 2000 [1957]: 111). Barthes' project, first to expose the gears of myth that work to turn ideology; second to imagine shutting down the ideological machine altogether, takes place entirely in the domain of the Saussurean sign. So in *Mythologies*, he observes how the signifier and signified of myth attaches itself to cultural artefacts as a way of endorsing ideology. Then through an analysis of the forms by which cultural artefacts appear he sets out to "denounce [the] form's petit-bourgeois character." In *Empire of Signs* he advances the "struggle": "it is not signs that must be cracked open – signifiers on one side, signifieds on the other – but the very idea of the sign: an operation that might be called semioclasm" (1985 [1970]: 85).

Barthes' use of semiology to break open ideology can be seen as an integral part of his philosophy; but for the purposes of understanding the visceral as it applies to cinema, there are two particular facets of Saussure – reinterpreted as an investigation into sign structures that are not simply linguistic – which are useful here. The first is the central tenet of semiology, that the relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary; while the second is that the arrangement of sign systems are based on the notions of the paradigm and the syntagm.

ARBITRARINESS

In the Peircean schema, arbitrariness is reserved for the symbol: words, phrases and so forth which become associated with their meanings by usage; a definition that entirely defines the relationship between signifier and signified in Saussure. Barthes restates this essential feature of semiology before appropriating it to the non-linguistic cultural artefact: "In a simple system like language, the signified cannot distort anything at all because the signifier, being empty, arbitrary, offers no resistance to it" (2000 [1957]: 122). The idea of distortion mentioned here is important as it suggests a hierarchy of sign systems whereby the signifier's correlation with the signified is dependent on the conventions by which that signifier is understood in a society. Hence, written and spoken language is based on an arbitrary relationship between the "concept" (signified) and "the acoustic image (which is mental)" (the signifier); and in terms of the sound of words or their scriptural counterparts, as signifiers they have no analogical relationship to the concepts they describe (113). But, because they are bound to their concepts by convention, by usage, such language signifiers are, in themselves, 'innocent'.

The loss of innocence of language as it services myth is of course the focus of Barthes' early work; so that in *Mythologies* he declares there exist

> two semiological systems, one of which is staggered in relation to the
> other: a linguistic system, the language (or the modes of representation
> which are assimilated to it), which I shall call the *language-object*,
> because it is the language which myth gets hold of in order to build its
> own system; and myth itself, which I shall call *metalanguage*, because it
> is a second language, *in which* one speaks about the first. (115)

This metalanguage has "two aspects: one full, which is the meaning [...], one empty, which is the form [...] What the concept distorts is of course what is full, the meaning" (122). As is suggested here, meaning is no less arbitrary than the acoustic image that underpins it, but because it is inflected by the machinations of an ideologically-sanctioned myth, it is regarded as entirely 'natural'. Myth, however, is to a greater or lesser degree, motivated: "there is no myth without motivated form" (129).

Applied to film, the relationship between the signifier as form and the signified as concept and as meaning, is illustrated by Barthes through the understanding of what particular shots mean in the context of the films in which they occur. He finds, for instance, some credence in linking the French noun *la plongee*, which can translate as a cinematographic high angle shot, and *plonger*, which is the infinitive verb 'to plunge', as a signified of crushing, before dispelling it. His reasons for disregarding this reading is, however unorthodox, indicative of the relationship between language and cinema:

> the overhead shot may have signified crushing, but we know this
> rhetoric is outmoded precisely because we feel it is based on an
> analogical relation between 'to plunge' and 'to crush', which seems
> naive to us, above all today when a psychology of 'denial' has taught us
> that there could be a valid relation between a content and the form
> which seems to be most 'naturally' its contrary. (1985 [1963]: 16.)

Of course, the reading of types of shot as translations of their counterparts in written and spoken language does not hold up when one considers how these shots are described in languages other than French. However, the main point here is that the form and its meaning is motivated. Images, which seem to offer the greatest analogue to reality, are inflected by the processes of cinema. While Barthes cites a psychology of denial as invalidating the similarity between the concept of crushing and the high-angle shot, the idea of this relationship remains even in twenty-first century cinema. In an interview, Ari Folman, the writer, director and producer of *Waltz with Bashir* (2008) cites precisely this example of the high-angle shot as a method of subjugating the human object in film.[21] There is, then, a definiteness to the meaning of shots within a film; meanings which are altered by the "organisation of signifiers among themselves"; thus how the overhead shot is interpreted within the context of the shots that surround it (16).

The main point here is that semiology allows a greater analysis of what happens within signs. Its efficacy for Barthes is that it allows the theorist to dismantle the sign; and in doing so can discover how meanings are separate from their source, the signifier. So when Barthes says that "the number of signifieds always exceeds the number of signifiers" he is stimulating an awareness of how signs mean. In his own example, the importance of the overhead shot as a sign is not that it is a signified of crushing, but that the viewer is aware it is a signified of crushing: "In this awakening

of meaning provoked by the overhead shot, what is important is the awakening, not the meaning" (16).

This emphasis away from meaning can be construed as positing the signifier over the signified. This is very much a move away from the logic of meaning; what Derrida identifies as a decentring: "even today the notion of a structure lacking any centre represents the unthinkable itself" (1978: 279). Why this should be unthinkable is discussed by Barthes, in his theory of myth. Myth, as already mentioned, attaches itself to meaning, and it distorts it, "But this distortion is not an obliteration". Myth needs concepts, for while "they are half-amputated, they are deprived of memory, not of existence: they are at once stubborn, silently rooted there, and garrulous, a speech wholly at the service of the concept. The concept, literally, deforms, but does not abolish the meaning; a word can perfectly render this contradiction: it alienates it" (2000 [1957]: 122-123). As previously stated, and what will become Barthes' eventual project, the aim is 'semioclasm', the breaking apart of Western discourse's elementary forms; a move from the definite to the indefinite.

Indefiniteness in film may seem impossible, but as postulated earlier, both Cassavetes and Cronenberg achieve this through the inescapable fullness and emptiness that is presented in their cinemas. The concept of fullness and emptiness here of course echo Barthes' definitions of signified and signifier, yet it would be wrong to suggest that Cassavetes' is a cinema of the signified and Cronenberg's a cinema of the signifier. Rather, these terms 'full' and 'empty', taken together, are illustrative of the relationship between the subjunctive/indicative mode of discourse and the discourse motivated by meaning. Cassavetes and Cronenberg's cinemas are therefore regarded as inadequate to creating meaning. In Barthes' formula, myth feeds off existent sign systems, creating a new signifier from a sign that "is *already* complete, [one that] postulates a kind of knowledge, a past, a memory, a comparative order of facts, ideas, decisions" (2000 [1957]: 117). The purity of this sign is deformed by the mythical signifier, so that the original "meaning loses its value, but keeps its life, from which the form of the myth will draw its nourishment" (118). The incompleteness of Cassavetes and Cronenberg's cinemas as generators of meaning essentially negate the possibility of 'mythical distortion.' This is the profile of the 'other' that Derrida alludes to in his description of the indicative as an agent of

impure expression. In Cassavetes and Cronenberg, this impurity is manifest at even the base level of meaning: their films offend ideology because, in each case, the organisation of signifiers is unable to generate meaningful signs.

This is therefore the background to Cassavetes and Cronenberg's indefiniteness: indefinite in location, indefinite in time, indefinite in purpose. Exactly where and when does the singing contest in *Husbands* take place, and why are we being shown it? Why is the site of an erotic staging so coolly unerotic, as in *Crash*? Branigan makes the case for indefiniteness brilliantly: "One might deny the existence of "indefiniteness" in a film by saying that a shot is too 'concrete' and shows only a time that is definite [...] However, the question would then arise, what sort of 'camera' – what conception of a camera – allows one to speak in this way?" (2006: 239.) In both *Husbands* and *Crash* the camera is present, but it is not impartial. Of course, as highlighted by Folman above, the camera is never impartial only that the ideological construct of the cinema makes it so, appearing as (for instance) a lens from which the viewer can assess the image's plausibility within the framework of character, narrative or genre. As filmmaker Jean Rouch observes, "Most people refuse to recognise that any anthropology must destroy what it investigates" (in Eaton, 1979: 48). The anthropology of Cassavetes and Cronenberg's cinema is itself distorted so that myth may not intervene, and this distortion occurs through the presence of the camera:

> It is no longer a matter of pretending that the camera isn't there, but of transforming its role by asserting its presence, by stressing the part it plays, by turning a technical obstacle into a pretext for revealing new and astonishing things. A matter of creating, through the very act of filming itself, an entirely new conception of the filmic event. (74)

Indefiniteness persists in the awareness that what is being shown is a filmic event, yet the event itself is divorced from meaning by the camera's presence: in *Husbands* the performances of the actors are demonstrably remote from the camera's involvement; in *Crash* the mechanical, anonymous performances are acted out for the camera, not the prospective audience. In both cases the audience is witness to a diegesis to which it is not invited.

The term 'filmic' is instructive here, as it resonates with Barthes' "The Third Meaning" (1977), which informs both Kristin Thompson's "Excess in Narrative

Cinema" (2004) and Lowenstein's essay on Barthes and Bazin already mentioned here. The filmic, in this way, corresponds with, or is at least sympathetic to, many of the concepts that describe the visceral: excess, subjunctive/indicative, emptiness, the list and so on. The filmic is an "alternate text" that exists on the level of the "obtuse" or "third meaning": it moves "beyond the image's first level of explicit information and second level of implicit symbolism into a third-level realm where language and metalanguage end". The filmic is therefore "theoretically locatable but not describable". Barthes finds the filmic in the film still which, unlike the "conventional photograph" relies on the "diegetic horizon" of the film from which it is lifted. In this sense the still is less a 'capture' than a "quotation" from the film: "film and still find themselves in a palimpsest relationship without it being possible to say that one is *on top* of the other or that one is *extracted* from the other" (Barthes, 1977: 64-67; also Lowenstein, 2007: 64). According to Watts (2005), "Barthes' Third Meaning is also a Third Way, a baroque fold that unhinges the oppositions and alternatives of structuralist poetics" (25).

It is therefore possible to advance Cassavetes and Cronenberg as exponents of the filmic as their cinemas resist completeness, produced in an environment of the signifier not the signified. Barthes observes this as a rare occurrence: "Forced to develop in a civilization of the signified, it is not surprising that (despite the incalculable number of films in the world) the filmic should still be rare [. . .] so much so that it could be said that as yet the film does not exist." (Barthes, 1977: 65.)

The visceral in the manner of the filmic can be perceived as occurring at the moment of the film's unwillingness to communicate on any definite, concrete level. Here, this includes language and metalanguage that refuses to make sense at even the most basic level: the written and spoken word.

As Branigan identifies, there are many ways in which language and metalanguage in its written and spoken forms can project indefiniteness: "'a', 'some', 'somewhat', 'somehow', 'something else', 'it', 'this and that', 'whatnot', 'blah-blah', 'now and again', 'occasionally', 'one day', 'someplace', 'somebody', 'other'." Words, that is, whose function is to reject the absolute, presumed objectivity of meaning. (2006; 238.) *Husbands* is a perfect example of this: one could argue that the songs in the singing contest mobilise precisely this indefiniteness through their inapplicability to

the circumstance; reversing the function of the song in film as a form of additional emotional expression or exposition either within the diegesis, as in the musical, or without, as in the increasing use of recognisable songs on the non-diegetic soundtrack of both mainstream and non-mainstream films. (Indeed it is possible for a film to gain credibility through its choice of musical soundtrack.)

Yet there are more evident ways in which Cassavetes avoids direct meaning in his use of language. It is what Kouvaros identifies as the "flight" of words. After the singing contest, in the toilet cubicle once the extended session of vomiting has ended, Archie tells Gus "he has something important to say":

> I want to tell you how I really feel. I mean I want to tell you what's really bothering me... I'm going to tell you now what it is... What it must be, because it's not the sickness. I can live with that. No. Here's what it is... It's... It's ah... It's a tremendous need... an anxiety. It's a, ah... you see that's what happens. I forget what it is... I mean, I mean, what is it? It's gotta be important, right? 'Cause... well I... What are you feeling? I mean what are we supposed to be feeling? 'Cause what I'm feeling... I don't know what I'm feeling. You see what I mean? In other words... You see it's... I gotta find out because I... I know what it is.

Introduced as an outpouring of emotion, this ostensible confession is in fact a "strangulation of language", "a simultaneous convergence and rending asunder of thought and language" (Kouvaros, 2004: 183).

This is then Barthes' third level of meaning in action, exposed through the voice of the actor. It is, naturally, possible to make sense of Archie's monologue in terms of gender, as an aspect of masculinity that has trouble communicating emotion. But in the context of a film in which the viewer is kept outside the dynamics between characters, this is merely another obstacle to meaning. As a test of this, it is worthwhile comparing this instance of spoken language with its use in a genre with which Cassavetes film is sometimes associated: melodrama.

Academics, for sure, find evidence in the Cassavetes film that appears to indulge in melodrama (see for example Warren, 2006). Certainly, Elsaesser (1987) offers a useful definition of the genre that has apparent confluences with the Cassavetes *oeuvre*: "Considered as an expressive code, melodrama might therefore be described as a particular form of dramatic *mise-en-scene*, characterised by a dynamic use of spatial and musical categories, as opposed to intellectual or literary ones. Dramatic

situations are given an orchestration which will allow for complex aesthetic patterns." (51.) Opposed to intellectual and literary categories, the Cassavetes film can certainly be described as dynamic and expressive. In Archie's speech from *Husbands* then, the 'code' of incommunicability that is an aspect of male-ness is able to be expressed through the dynamism of performance: the message gets through despite the limitations of the language used by the character.

However, to demonstrate the failing of language to communicate in *Husbands*, let us compare Archie's speech to a conversation that occurs in Douglas Sirk's *Imitation of Life* (1959). The characters are Annie, the black mother of Sarah Jane, who is able to pass for white. Sarah Jane has run away and is staying in a hotel, where Annie has tracked her down. So as not to disclose her racial heritage to a friend, Sarah Jane pretends her mother is the maid. Annie instinctively accepts this role and tells the friend she was only visiting Sarah Jane, whom 'she used to take care' of. As Annie leaves, Sarah Jane says, 'Good bye,' then whispers so that only Annie can hear, 'Mama.' Afterwards, Sarah Jane's friend says, 'Well, get you! So honey-child, you had a Mammy!' to which Sarah Jane replies, 'Yes, all my life.'

The whispered word, *Mama*, is an instance of what Kozloff (2000) argues is a "hallmark" of the melodramatic scene; an example of "*sotto voce*" (literally, in Italian, 'under the voice'), "where the character's real meaning is spoken only under his or her breath, illustrating the extent to which speech is rendered impossible in certain situations." The "flight" here is "from a society that immediately assumes that any black woman must be a maid or a Mammy"; thus 'Mama' is "a word that must be spoken but cannot be spoken out loud". The *sotto voce*, Mama, is audible only within the diegesis by the character who needs to hear it; but its inclusion as a signified that can also be heard – and crucially understood – by the audience requires that it retain a function within the first and second levels of meaning set out by Barthes. It operates explicitly as a signified of the relationship between Sarah Jane and Annie; yet also implicitly as a symbol of the "irreconcilable pressures" of a society that would not approve of this relationship (246). It is a word that must be spoken, because the implicit symbolism of the signified must be understood. The *sotto voce* can be read in this way as a criticism of the signified, associated as it is with the furtiveness that has become a necessity in issues of race (contemporary to

1959, at least); yet it is existent in the ideological baggage where mythical signs are formed, so that the word must mean, not just simply be. To return to Barthes' image of the camera angle that represents crushing, the word, Mama, coupled with its very particular inflection in *Imitation of Life* is simply a signified of a contrary attitude to a certain ideological perspective.

Archie's confession to Gus is not quite *sotto voce*, but it is definitely quieter in tone than the explosive bravado of uncontrollable laughter and heckling of the singing contest that precedes it. It really does seem as though he has something important to say. However, and as transcribed above, sentences are incomplete; the thoughts of the character are incommunicable. Most importantly, however, in the light of Sirk's melodramatic dialogue, Archie's inability to express himself does not only occur within the diegesis of *Husbands*, but also outside it, to the ear of the audience. *Imitation of Life*, concerned with representations of women and race, communicates its issues through character. *Husbands*, on the other hand, and typical of the director's entire *oeuvre* liaises with emotion and ideology in a far more troublesome manner. In Kouvaros' words, "Cassavetes' camera concentrates on how emotion is amplified, dispersed, or rejected – both among the characters and between the characters and the film itself." (2004: 110.) The emphasis on the camera in this overview of a Cassavetes' 'trait' typifies how integral the camera's presence is to any interaction in his cinema. Returning to Lowenstein's characterisation of Barthes and Bazin as united by a commitment to surrealism, alongside Branigan's suggestion that conceptually, there are many different types of camera, it is possible to state that Cassavetes too is committed to the idea of reality as additionally problematic once filtered through a lens. Krauss (1986) writes that "all surrealistic production is precisely [the] experience of nature as representation, physical matter as writing" (115); and this is what Cassavetes achieves: a exposure of the act of speaking, and the words that are spoken, as a conglomeration of arbitrary signifiers before they are able to be deformed into sense-making entities from which myth (at the service of ideology) can take hold and distort. The list therefore has no meaning – to which can be included the list of half-finished sentences uttered by Archie in his monologue – as at any time its contents can be amplified, dispersed or rejected by the filmic text; but the audience will never know when to read each moment as an act of amplification, dispersal, rejection, or even (and this word must be taken advisedly),

'sincerity'. For Cassavetes, as for Rouch before him, the camera renders a "whole work of lies" that is "more real than the truth." (1979: 51.)

Realising written and spoken language as wholly arbitrary signifiers occurs in Cronenberg's films as well, although the obtuse meaning is a result, not of expansion as in Cassavetes' case, but very much as a support for the landscape of emptiness already outlined. *Spider* (2002) follows a schizophrenic man's return home to the South London home of his childhood. The film communicates the emotional damage of its protagonist, Dennis Cleg, through the performance of the actor, Ralph Fiennes: "Anxious, burdened by jerky body movements", "ill-kempt" and "ill at ease" (Mathijs, 2008: 207). When he speaks, which is rarely, it is to himself. His sentences are fragmented even further than Archie's in *Husbands*, although they elicit a precise topography, a concrete awareness of place at odds with Archie's testimony, which consists of unqualified, abstract terms ('anxiety', 'sickness'). Lying on the warped mattress in a grubby, bedsit rookery, Dennis recalls specific places: 'Kitchener Street... Spleen Street... Omdurman Close... The Allotments... By the railway... by the railway... and down the canal... and down the canal... Kitchener Street... My mum...' This is, of course, not an obstinate refusal to engender meaning in the manner of *Husbands*, but in fact an *aide memoire* for Dennis, and a part of the knotted yarn that is to be untangled for the audience. As Mathijs quite rightly states, "*Spider*'s story [...] offers a closely controlled narrative that first appears to be labyrinthine but which in the end makes perfect sense." As a revelatory "man's quest into his own past" (207), the film is intent on revealing the distinction between memory and false memory, and diagnosing Dennis' mis-remembrances as products of a fractured mind. Such a reading of the film is encouraged by its marketing; with *Spider*'s official website showing Fiennes' face 'cracking'. Further distortion is possible by hovering the mouse over the image. This is the cinema of the "metonymic path", intent on declaring, always, that "something is happening" (Barthes, 1985 [1963]: 17).[22]

The minutely observed events of Dennis' past and how they instigate the traumas of the present complete *Spider*: the film "needs no epilogue" (210). Yet in this ostensible completeness remain artefacts that are as much arbitrary signifiers, capable

of inculcating nothing but obtuse meanings, or even meaninglessness into the sense-making apparatus of the film, as those foregrounded by Cassavetes in *Husbands*.

In *Spider* the primary artefact that accesses this mode of meaninglessness is Dennis' notebook. Close ups of its pages reveal that the notes are written in "a sort of runic handwriting" (207): unintelligible, untranslatable, they are undoubtedly motivated by Dennis' state of mind, and are therefore as evidentiary as signifieds as Fiennes' clothing and performance; however, through their opacity, Dennis' written 'words' effectively close off a portion of his mind. So, while the audience is able to interpret the facts of his past through the construct of the flashback – which is introduced here through the device of Dennis observing his childhood 'from the wings' (through a window, for instance) – the functions of words on the page for the protagonist are not so easily located: their meanings remain obtuse. Assumptions are that this scription is related to the memory, but as Bateman (2007) is clear to point out, in the discourse of film, interpretation is not always a given, as a correlation of shots do not automatically generate connectedness:

> Speakers/hearers can then be uncertain about 'correct' interpretations
> because the meaning that we ascribe to sequences of shots is always
> defeasible — for example, a sequence consisting of a scientist looking
> through a microscope followed by an irised view of microorganisms
> may turn out in the next shot to have been a point-of-view shot, but then
> again, it might not. (60.)

The image of the microscope used by Bateman in this example is instructive for an analysis of Cronenberg's use of language as it supports our original hypothesis that his cinema is visceral because it approaches a condition of emptiness which provokes "the retreat of the signified" (Barthes, 1985 [1970]: 84). In the example of *Spider*, Cronenberg institutes a customary penetration into the temporal structure of the film in the manner of the scientist looking into the microscope. What he achieves, even in a narrative that makes sense, is an interrogation of the aesthetic that goes so deep that what actually materialises for the viewer are mere abstractions, such as the notes written in Dennis' notebook. This is 'customary', as it occurs even in those films where the central protagonist is articulate enough to describe what is happening, as in those instances of bodily transformation that occur in *Videodrome* or *The Fly*. In the latter film, by envisaging the transformation of the mutated scientist Seth Brundle (Jeff Goldblum) from the microscopic level upwards rather than splitting him into

two beings, Cronenberg – as he explains on the director's commentary to the film – was able to allow the mutation to speak. Brundle is then able to communicate on the philosophy of being an insect, speculating on 'insect politics' and the existential quandary of whether he was ever a man, or always an insect that only dreamed of being human, 'and liked it'. As Cronenberg's characters ruminate on these possible scenarios, the spoken and written discourses of the films become abstracted, arbitrary and indefinite. Brundle's words and Dennis' scription become less intelligible than the *sotto voce*: they are discourses to be spoken softly, but their true meanings are so private, so internal, not even the members of the audience are trusted confidants.

It is worth stating here that both Cassavetes and Cronenberg's implementations of written and spoken language are methods of access, rather than visceral devices *per se*. This is the case with Cronenberg's three-and-a-half-minute short film *At the Suicide of the Last Jew in the World in the Last Cinema in the World* (2007), which is replete with "indefinite expressions" as pointed out by Branigan (2006: 238); but in context they retain specific functions in keeping with the sense of the film. Thus in the film there are the words "'apparently', 'might', 'I'm told', 'I'm not certain of this', 'somehow', 'somewhere'". These are spoken by two unseen newscasters, Sherry and Rolf, whose continuous voiceovers are providing background information on the event of the film's title; enacted as a single, wide-angled close-up of the wordless protagonist (Cronenberg himself) loading a pistol and systematically pressing the muzzle against his head, withdrawing it, then repeating the process without ever pulling the trigger. The continuous close-up is, as Mathijs observes, a view through "a surveillance camera or home video camera" and, coupled with the commentary, lends the film the impression of a live broadcast from a popular TV news network. In this way Sherry and Rolf's "fragmented stream of contentions, comments, allegations, asides *faits divers*, personal opinions and *aplombs*, guesswork and general phatic communication" (2008: 254) contrasted with "the deliberate yet undetermined actions of the image form an indictment of contemporary television in its most incessantly 'real' formats".

In this way indefiniteness in spoken language services a particular comment on "the culture of egocentrism and narcissism" in "the news show and the reality-TV show"(255). *At the Suicide of the Last Jew in the World in the Last Cinema in the*

World is therefore explicitly political; yet the juxtaposition of sound and image in the film is also able to reveal the presence of the visceral: the indefiniteness of spoken language as an expression of media shallowness serving to reinforce the filmic properties of the image. In fact, the most revealing example of indefiniteness in the film comes not through the diegesis, but in the film's title. Its name, which could just as easily been *The Suicide of the Last Jew in the World*, but qualifies its location with the preposition, *At*. Except, of course, 'at' is itself an ambiguous assertion of location or event: as a geographical or conditional marker it does not give away details, even though the lengthy title of the film appears to offer a meaning that is entirely direct. The events are broadcast 'as live', promising the spectacle of a suicide, which is never 'acted out' for the camera. And what of the second clause in the film's title? Here, beginning with the far more specific preposition 'in', the location is fixed for the viewer: having read the title card, there is no uncertainty about where this film is to take place.

However, the setting of the *mise-en-scene* contradicts the mental image that 'cinema' evokes: Cronenberg's 'last Jew' is not in an auditorium with seats and a screen, but a vandalised public toilet in the theatre; a setting justified by Sherry and Rolf as the cinema itself has been torn apart, in anticipation of its final demolition: 'Everyone will breathe a sigh of relief when this thing is blown to bits,' says Sherry.

Confounding audience expectations, the film's location further reveals Cronenberg's commitment to stripping back, rather than opening out meaning. As with the placelessness of *Husbands*' singing contest and its bathroom aftermath, the bathroom in *At the Suicide of the Last Jew in the World in the Last Cinema in the World* is an indeterminate space. While there are certain readings that can be made of the *mise-en-scene*, linked to the sensationalist fascination reality television has with scatology, the important observation here is that the film pointedly refuses to refer to cinema or its artefacts. To explicitly frame a film as being 'about' cinema and then visualise certain cinematic properties in the *mise-en-scene* is to be prescriptive about what cinema's 'nature' is. In this way, showing a screen – even a blank screen – in the film is to move away from Barthes' filmic; and, correspondingly, to open out meaning in a way Cronenberg's *oeuvre* steadfastly resists. For instance Bigas Luna's *Angustia* (1986), largely set in a cinema in which the actions of the in-film

audience emulate those of the actors in the film they are watching, illustrates how meaning is perpetuated by the presence of a screen in the diegesis.

The emptiness of Cronenberg's cinema is conceptual more than visual. We may then say that it operates in a similar way to the 'zipper' or 'stripe' paintings of Barnett Newman. These canvases, painted in acrylic, consist of a single colour (such as *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue II* (1967)) interrupted by thin strips of another hue. Newman's philosophy was part of a wider belief in the purpose of painting adopted by American artists. Thus in 1943, Newman, alongside Mark Rothko and Adolph Gottlieb, wrote that the burgeoning of a non-representational style was "an adventure into an unknown world"; and, they continue,

> must insult anyone who is spiritually attuned to interior decoration;
> pictures for the home; pictures for over the mantel; pictures of the
> American scene; social pictures; purity in art; prize-winning potboilers;
> the National Academy, the Whitney Academy, the Corn Belt Academy;
> buckeyes; trite tripe, etc. (Gottlieb, et al, 1999 [1943]: 562-563)

Newman, then, as part of this school, is resistant to ideas of offering an identifiable visual experience for the viewer. And, as with Newman, we might say that Cronenberg too is "after bigger game than providing stimulus to the spectator's retina." Searching instead for a way "to induce emptiness to exclaim its secret", Cronenberg can be seen to continue Newman's project to "exclude nature", but realising that in order to do so he must depict something. For Newman, "colour effaced itself and became the hue of undifferentiated substance." Such a tactic put Newman at "war" with the interpretations of critics and art historians, who resist the notion that the Newman canvas, as critic Harold Rosenberg observes, is only "red or yellow because it must be *something*" (Rosenberg, 1972: 91); similarly, Cronenberg sets *At the Suicide of the Last Jew in the World in the Last Cinema in the World* in a public toilet because it must be set *somewhere*. Aesthetic blankness does not equal emptiness in cinema (or painting), but its opposite: it is a site of endless possibility, and in Cronenberg's universe, that will not do.[23]

PARADIGM/SYNTAGM

> It may seem paradoxical to go back to the grande syntagmatique of
> narrative film developed by Metz [...] which has now been discarded for
> no real reason and without having been proved wrong [...] (Colin, 1995:
> 45; Bateman, 2007: 13)[24]

It is worth remembering at this juncture that Cassavetes' lists and Cronenberg's

emptiness occur in the climate of narrative exegesis; whereby the language of

cinema, including the spoken word on the soundtrack, the written word in the *mise-*

en-scene, combined with the setting, costume, acting lighting, colour, the

cinematographic 'style', the music and so on, unite to form meaning across the

duration of the film. In this way it is possible to claim that, while the existence of the

visceral transgresses ideology, its greatest offense is against the 'sense' of the cause-

and-effect of narrative, tied as it is to the related terms metonymy and the syntagm.

Barthes, in 1963, said that

> the cinema seems, for the moment, to have chosen the metonymic path
> – or if you prefer, the syntagmatic path, the syntagm being an extended,
> arranged fragment, actualised by signs; in short, a section of narrative.
> It's very striking that, in contrast to the literature of 'nothing happens'
> (the prototype of which would be *Sentimental Education*), the cinema,
> even the kind which doesn't seem at the outset to be commercial, is a
> discourse in which the story, the anecdote, the plot (with its major
> consequence, *suspense*) are never absent [...] At the movies, 'something
> is happening,' and this fact is naturally closely related to the
> metonymic, syntagmatic path I was just talking about. (1985 [1963]: 16-
> 17)

Barthes' affirmation that this is a condition of cinema 'for the moment' betrays his

affinity with a particular type of viewing experience: "The best films (to me) are

those which best withhold meaning" (he suggests Luis Bunuel's *Exterminating Angel*

(1962) as an example); yet as with his comments on the relationship between the

written/spoken sign and the cinematographic sign mentioned earlier, it also

anticipates a sea change in cinema-audience relationships that has not moved beyond

their symbiotic need to generate sign systems that contain signifieds that correspond

plausibly and unequivocally with their signifiers in the fifty years since he made this

comment (21).

So, metonymy and the syntagm are as prevalent in cinema as they ever were. And

with scriptwriting courses instilling the model of the three-act structure in its

students, 'narrative' becomes synonymous with rigidity; a steadfast mechanism through which filmmakers can strive to always 'make sense'. Narrative, indeed, may be the last great myth of cinema;[25] consequently it is important as an edifice that the visceral is capable of supplanting, as films are continually striving to be about something; and for the purposes of financing and audience response, narrative is the capital that enables a cinema to be successful. As Chatman states, "narrative itself is a deep structure quite independent of its medium" (1980); however, as Cubitt notes, it is possible to reject the claim that cinematic structures are inherently narrative by nature. To claim that cinema was always a narrative artform is to apply a view of its history that has the clarity of "twenty-twenty hindsight": "because we know cinema came to be dominated by narrative fictions, therefore it must have been narrative all along" (2004: 38).

The divergence of Chatman and Cubitt's theoretical positions on the importance of narrative in film can be pursued through the implementation of a third figure, the film semiologist Christian Metz, whose *grande syntagmatique* sought to revolutionise the ways in which film was discussed as discourse in the 1970s by developing a taxonomy of the image roughly analogous to the discoveries of Saussure and Barthes (among others) on how written and spoken language works. Thus, according to Bateman (2007), Metz "produced an abstract classification of the meaningful possibilities available to a filmmaker when conjoining shots in a narrative film that has continued to structure discussions of the relations between film and semiotics [sic] to this day." (13.) The *grande syntagmatique* was, in particular, conceived as "a broadly linguistically-inspired semiotics in order to synthesise a wide range of previous approaches to 'film montage' within a single unified framework." (14.)

The importance of film montage in relation to Cassavetes and Cronenberg's *oeuvres* has yet to be discussed here. It is, however, worthwhile rehearsing why montage, particularly as it is applied by Metzian semiology is seen as important to supporting film's narrative function; and why it might also serve to conversely (even perversely) suggest an alternative to narrative.

As made explicit by Metz's translator Michael Taylor in his introduction to the terminology used by Metz in *Film Language: a semiotics of the cinema* (1974), Metz's approach to categorising the types of montage is indebted entirely to the

Saussurean model of the sign as made up of a signifier and its signified (ix); nonetheless it is worth noting that, although Metz will discuss the "relationship between [...] signifiers and significates [signifieds]" in film, he adds, "Cinematographic signification is always more or less motivated, never arbitrary" (1974: 108). Clearly Metz's understanding of the cinematic sign does not allow for Barthes' third meaning, Branigan's indefiniteness or the visceral to enter. Cinema is meaning, so that "the image of a dog is like a dog" (109); in this way the way cinematic signs are understood are purely through a process of either denotation or connotation.

Both denotation and connotation in Metz are therefore instrumental in cinema's motivated structure; so that in denotation "the motivation is furnished by analogy – that is to say, by the perceptual similarity between the signifier and the [signified]." (108.) Connotation, meanwhile, "is always symbolic in nature": the signified "motivates the signifier but goes beyond it." Metz's example is "the cross" as "the symbol of Christianity": "although Christ died on a cross (the motivation), there are many more things in Christianity than there are in a cross (the 'overtaking')" (109). These objective terms, denotation and connotation, can of course be mapped across Barthes' understanding of the first two levels at which images make sense (the informational, the symbolic) and are usurped by the indescribable facet of the filmic. Usurp is my word, not Barthes, as it describes the visceral not as a discretionary aspect of the image that may be taken or left by the viewer as he sees fit, but one that more forcefully obstructs cinema as a sense-making mechanism.

Metz's rejection of cinema as capable of containing a third, obtuse, or visceral level of meaning betrays how his *grande syntagmatique* prioritises narrative forms of cinematic expression. As Bateman observes, Metz "grants an important role to *narrative*". He adds "that [the] role is one of a 'guide' rather than a definition" and "should not be taken to be limiting the account *a priori* or to marginalise non-narrative films" (2007: 14). However, it is worth pointing out that the emphasis here on either narrative or non-narrative films; a structuralist approach that allows for non-narrative forms which are discrete from narrative forms, not for non-narrative elements that may co-exist with narrative elements in an example of an ostensibly narrative cinema. Bateman relates this argument to a long-held belief by linguists

such as Hjelmslev "that messages are only messages with respect to codes: if there is no code (because there is infinite variation and thus no distinctive distinctions), there is no message. This appeared to Metz, given the manifest meaningfulness of film, to be clearly untenable." (19.) There is, once again, an openly divergent theoretical position to Barthes', who explicitly declares in "The Photographic Message" that "the photographic image [...] is a message without a code" (1977: 17). While he amends this argument in *Camera Lucida*, he is far from agreeing with Metz that a photographed image is 'like' its real-life counterpart:

> The realists, of whom I am one and of whom I was already one when I
> asserted the Photograph was an image without code – even if,
> obviously, certain codes do inflect our reading of it – the realists do not
> take the photograph for a 'copy' of reality but for an emanation of past
> reality [.]

It is for this reason Barthes sees photography as "a magic, not an art" (1981: 88). Lowenstein, indeed, finds Barthes' last published works on the photographic image as "closer to a retrenchment than a retraction of [the] earlier notion of photographic realism": "it functions as a clarification that this realism was always closer to an affective 'emanation' than to pure reproduction". Lowenstein concludes this analysis by returning to his original idea that Barthes and Bazin's sympathies dovetail with regard to 'photographic realism.' Barthes, he writes, is "closer (at least indirectly) to Bazin's factual hallucination than to Sartre's essential poverty of the imagined image" (2007: 59). In such a way, this poverty of the image is precisely what Metz is also promoting under the guise of cinematic realism: "the photograph can only reveal what the viewer has already brought to their encounter with it, so it cannot teach us anything we do not already know" (55-56). Sartre defends his position with regard to a photo of 'Pierre': "if that photo appeals to me as the photo 'of Pierre,' if, in some way, I see Pierre behind it, it is necessary that the piece of card is animated with some help from me, giving it a meaning it did not yet have. If I see Pierre in the photo, *it is because I put him there*" (Sartre, 2004 [1940]: 19). In short, Metz's unified, "systematic" approach to the semiology of the cinematic image contrasts with the "iconoclastically[,] secularly *cinematic flux*, speed and movement of [Barthes'] thought" (Rosenbaum, 1982).

Aspiring towards scientific completeness, Metz's *grande syntagmatique* positions montage as capable of conveying the complexities of narrative, in particular "double time structuring", defined by Chatman as common to "all narratives in whatever medium". He states that in every case, narratives

> combine the time of sequence of plot events, the time of the *histoire* ('story-time') with the time of presentation of those events in the text, which we call the 'discourse-time'. What is fundamental to narrative, regardless of medium, is that these two time orders are independent." (1980)

The *grande syntagmatique*, classifying its definitions of montage into 'types' and 'subtypes' therefore describes how the distribution of shots are discerned as aspects of the *histoire* and the discourse-time at the discretion of the filmmaker: "It appears the different types and subtypes [...] can be redistributed into a system of successive dichotomies [...] This scheme gives us a better outline of the deep structure of the choices that confront the filmmaker for each one of the 'sequences' of his film" (Metz, 1974: 123). As noted by Bateman, it is through the subtypes of the *grande syntagmatique* that Metz attempts to fully describe how the combinations of shots mean:

> The subtypes of the classification then set out how a narrative episode can be discursively articulated by means of distinct combinations of shots to add particularly filmic meanings. The sequences thus characterised then stand in a *realisational* relationship to the events of the narrative: ie starting from a given 'event', the filmmaker can decide to decompose this event into a variety of kinds of sequences. (2007: 20)

Describing all of Metz's semiological types and subtypes of montage here would be fruitless. However, for the purposes of analysing the visceral cinemas of Cassavetes and Cronenberg, it is worthwhile examining just one of the subtypes Metz puts forward as examples of how montage contributes to meaning. Its selection here is strategic, demonstrating how the *grande syntagmatique*, through its limitations as a taxonomy of film capable of fully itemising every possible combination of shots in a sequence, can in fact be useful as a device for extracting the visceral essence from such a sequence. As Monaco (2000) states, "despite its idiosyncrasies and occasional confusions, [the *grande syntagmatique*] remains the only recent attempt to comprehend the complex system of montage" (220). To advance this observation for the purposes of an enquiry into the visceral, it is possible to assert that *because* of its

idiosyncrasies and occasional confusions, the *grande syntagmatique* is useful as a method by which the visceral can be comprehended.

The subtype under scrutiny here is the 'bracket syntagma'. In this case Metz not only defines the subtype but, as is customary throughout *Film Language*, he illustrates it with an example. The "bracket syntagma" is so named as the relationship between shots is the same "as that between the words in a typographical bracket. In the bracket syntagma it is frequently the case that different successive evocations are strung together through optical effects (dissolves, wipes, pan shots, and, less commonly, fades)." The purpose of such 'evocations', according to Metz, is that they offer "typical samples of a same order reality, without in any way chronologically locating them in relation to each other in order to emphasise the presumed kinship within a category of facts that the filmmaker wants to describe in visual terms." Metz's example is from Godard's *Une Femme Mariee* (1964), whose "first erotic images [...] sketch a global picture of 'modern love' through variations and partial repetitions". Viewed as "a kind of filmic equivalent to conceptualisation", it can itself be conceived as "an autonomous segment" within the picture as a whole, even though "None of these little scenes is treated with the full syntagmatic breadth it might have commanded" (1974: 126).

Applying the model of indefiniteness to Metz's bracket syntagma, Branigan identifies that in offering "typical samples of something" or illustrating "a recurring event", Metz's subtype "need not be the result of the existence of multiple shots". He affirms that Metz's evocations work on an assumption, that only the "'abstractions' of editing" are capable of "creating a sense of indefiniteness out of the 'concreteness' of separate shots" (2006: 240). This is an important point, as it is not so much evident in Metz's writing that he is critical of indefiniteness as a narrative device, but assures his reader that this indefiniteness is not a facet of the image, but a result of the interrelationship between images. In such a case the preferred term would be, perhaps, 'ambiguity' rather than 'indefiniteness'; reminding the viewer that the meaning of the image is not lost or unobtainable (as in Barthes' third meaning or the visceral) but merely 'open to interpretation'. Branigan's indefiniteness, meanwhile, effectively bridges the gap between the 'acceptable' ambiguity of narrative as a structure of shots wherein meaning is evident, if elusive;

and the visceral, which exists within the shot itself and whose existence cannot be rationalised as a dispersal of aesthetically, and meaningfully transparent, fragments through the technique of montage.

This is the core of an argument for the visceral: Cassavetes' revellers are not merely ambiguous, they are outside of what one can ascribe as meaningful. They are, in the Barthesian sense, obtuse. The editing of the sequence, if anything, only adds to the arbitrariness contained within the images themselves. The shot lengths of *Husbands*' singing contest range from one second to over a minute-and-a-half. As with the example from *Love Streams* cited earlier, the shots display an expenditure of energy, with even the shortest focusing on faces too darkly-lit to make out, or on observers who are irrelevant to the main action. At one point something 'exciting' happens, as one of the singers throws a glass through feeling 'the rejection' of not having her song appreciated. However, the glass-throwing and the rejection are merely apocryphal: the camera neither picks up the event nor its apparent motivation in the performance of the person who ostensibly caused it. (A similar moment of 'unobserved importance' occurs later in *Husbands*, as Gus performs what he calls the 'cigarette trick', which goes down well with his – that is, diegetic – audience but, by not being 'seen' by the camera, becomes an event without clarity in the film's 'process'.)

Here, then, is the aesthete polyphony of Cassavetes' cinema: the arbitrariness of montage is added to the arbitrariness of place and of character motivation. Even attempting to find motivation in the intent of the auteur raises only further questions. For example, it is possible to hypothesise that through the structure of the sequence, the rhythm of the editing and the looseness of Cassavetes' style follows the pattern of the songs. Certainly, 'When Irish Eyes Are Smiling' occurs as part of the 86-second shot that begins the sequence. Yet against this, 'My Best Girl' occurs over two shots, of 52, and ten seconds. Furthermore, during 'When Irish Eyes Are Smiling', the performer is never revealed, only anonymous backs and heads that frame Archie, Harry and Gus. This prompts another question about whether the song heard occurs as live, or has been dubbed over in post-production. Cassavetes' cinema is a cinema of not-knowing; of indication, never of motivation. After Metz and Branigan, of course, it is possible to explain the singing contest as an example of the bracket

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syntagma; in fact, this may well offer a way both to rationalise its occurrence outside of what can be ascribed as a discernible narrative and be offered as an example of how images of a 'same order reality' can be combined without recourse to optical devices (there are no dissolves or fades in *Husbands*, only cuts). Yet as is pointed out here, what is 'bracketed' is, essentially, nothing: perceptual evocations without meaning, sense, narrative.

In watching Cronenberg's films, there are none of the erratic editing techniques one finds in Cassavetes. The opening minutes of *Naked Lunch*, for instance, establishes a rhythm of shots of between two and five seconds in duration. Yet, remembering that Cronenberg's films reify the visceral through a stripping back rather than a stacking up of images, this is hardly surprising. His project (after Newman), to reveal an aesthetic that is about more than delivering stimulus to the spectator's retina, occurs within an editing schema that has the transparency of continuity. So, just as Cassavetes' images cannot be unified by an identifiable concept of montage, Cronenberg's penetrative emptiness cannot be classified or marked as operating in a series of locatably different shots.

It seems possible, however, to claim Cronenberg as conforming to the Metzian ideal: the routine and rhythm of shots are edited in an intelligible way. For sure, *Naked Lunch* is a perfect example of this. As critics of the film point out, the unfolding of the narrative is far too conventional, entirely at odds with the disjointed 'routines' which is the structure of the source novel written by William Burroughs. (See Skerl, 2009:173.) Yet what is discounted in this synopsis is the visceral, which occurs in spite of narrative as a consequence of montage. Cronenberg's thoughts on the concept of montage are informative here. In the documentary, "Naked Making Lunch" (Chris Rodley, 1992) Cronenberg is unequivocal in his attack on the Eisensteinian model that regards montage as a "collision" of shot 'elements' (Eisenstein, 2004 [1929]: 13-40): "when the script says 'The crowd roars like a lion', you cut to a lion roaring. Does that work? No, it´s silly, everybody laughs, it takes you out of the movie, and I´m glad that Eisenstein did it so I don´t have to!" For Cronenberg, the problem here is one that is easily soluble if one is working in literature, but "there is no direct screen equivalent". It is, for Cronenberg, the problem of conveying metaphor: "what do you do when you want to deliver a

concept that requires some kind of metaphor and you can´t do it the way it´s done on paper?" His answer is to manipulate aspects of the *mise-en-scene*:

> Often I end up using special effects for just this purpose. There´s a very specific example of this in Naked Lunch where we have a creature which evolves out of a typewriter that is all-sexual, a polymorphously perverse thing which leaps on the two people who have created it and participates in sex with them. That creature is really an allegorical being that you would probably call lust if you were writing in the fourteenth century. It would be the embodiment of the lust of these two people. So I´m doing something very literary there, but in a very cinematic way.
> (In Kermode, 1992: 12)

I shall discuss the many 'meanings' of special effects in a later chapter. For the moment, Cronenberg's understanding of cinema in literary terms assumes that what is most desirous for film's ontology is that it somehow 'become' literature. Cronenberg's aspirations are towards shaping rhetorical devices within the cinematic field, yet what is achieved is something else: the visceral. *Naked Lunch* becomes the perfect arena to act out how literary intent engenders the visceral as, above all else, it attempts to actualise the process of writing in visual terms. That is, using visual metaphors, special effects as signifiers for the act of writing. In this way, one motif of the film – the organic typewriter that is part writing apparatus, part beetle – becomes emblematic of how images are able to transgress the intended, metaphorical meaning laid down by the director.
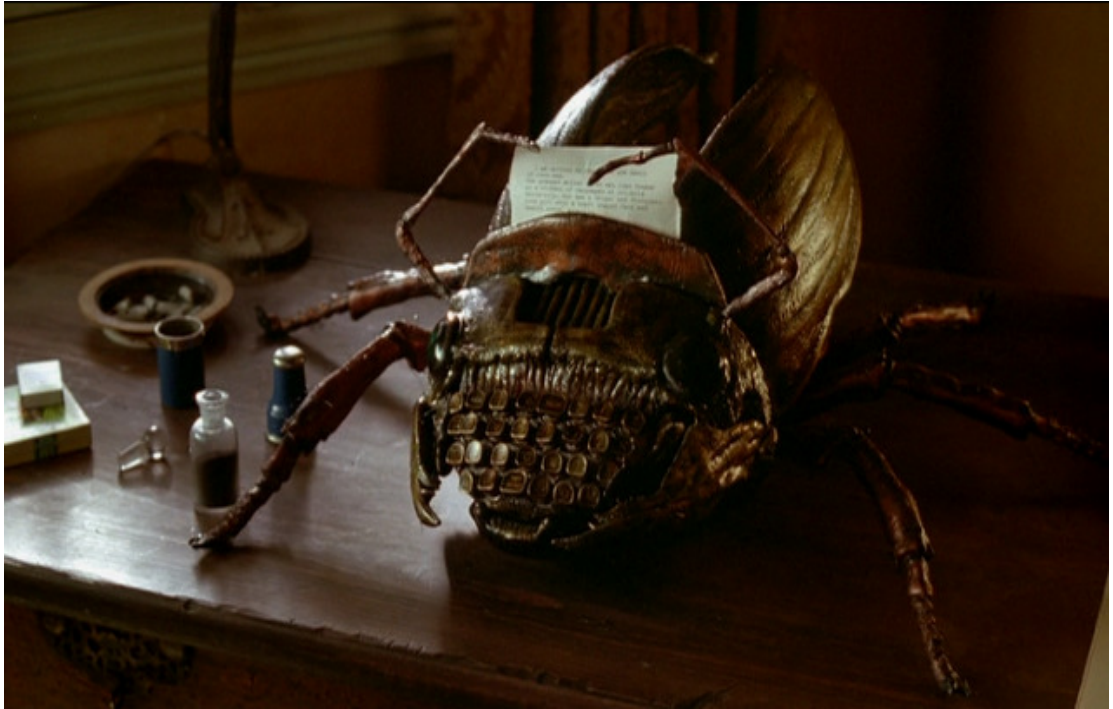
Figure 3: The Clark Nova typewriter as insect as metaphor as visceral: *Naked Lunch* **(David Cronenberg, 1992 [© Twentieth Century Fox/ The Criterion Collection]) Screen capture**

As would surely have been part of Cronenberg's intent, the insect-as-typewriter invokes a physicality to the act of writing that could not be revealed through standard biographical means. In this way the experience of writing is made tangible. To borrow Barthes' term, writing becomes no longer abstract, but has a "grain". Grain in Barthes' lexicon is "the body in the voice as it sings, the hand as it writes, the limb as it performs" (Barthes, 1977: 188). The typewriter, reconfigured into the body of an insect may be a metaphor for many things, and the plethora of insects in both Burroughs and Cronenberg's works certainly offer up many varieties of interpretation; from creatures that represent the soullessness of certain types of people to the otherworldliness of bacteria and disease. Yet what the insect typewriter conveys in the film is a visceral force. To return to Barthes, it is the difference between writing, which he declares has "taken on a metaphorical sense", and "scription", which is preferred as it is "the action by which we manually trace signs". Barthes admits that "above all, I love the traces of graphic activity, wherever they are..." (193.)

This, then, is the difference between the metaphor of writing and the physicality of scription. Writing occurs in the biopic of the writer, whose tortured soul is revealed

through certain tropes such as, but exclusively to do with a certain type of clothing, the over-consumption of alcohol, or the limited appreciation of social skills. Scription, on the other hand, is what *Naked Lunch* achieves: and it occurs through its ability to disobey the rules of narrative and in its place inhabit an existential dimension made up of objects that resonate with presence for the viewer. They aspire, in short, to transgress the artificial border between the image and the spectator, the border that is the screen. Cronenberg's *Naked Lunch* is therefore most visceral when it is most disquieting, an unnatural fusion of Burroughs and Cronenberg. Together they disclose not merely the tragedy that is the life of the writer, but also the poisonous power of writing itself. Cronenberg's *Naked Lunch* can be seen in this way as an assault on the biopic tradition, so becomes a useful case study on the ways films can deal with using less obvious techniques to delve into the supposed truths of the real life writer. And looked at as a broader understanding of film, it raises questions on how the persistent aesthetic of the moving image deals with extreme images, not as metaphorical or even rhetorical devices, but as agents of the visceral.

Of course, Cronenberg's second assumption is that Eisenstein's project is complete, and merely a historical curiosity. But as Atkinson (2010) asserts, the "influence" of Eisenstein's montage principle, while "indirect", "has come to predominate our mass industry in the new century, rather than, say, the contemporaneous syntax of Murnau, Keaton or Lang". Atkinson observes that "Eisenstein and *Potemkin* [as his most widely-distributed film] are the progenitors of post-Spielberg/Lucas blockbuster Hollywood as we know it" (93). There are, then, two levels of transgression at play in Cronenberg's cinema: the attempt to emulate literary, rather than cinematic codes in the service of an aesthetic; and, related to this, the refutation of a particular 'style' of praxis. The by-product of these two modes of resistance effectively invites the visceral.

The existential immediacy of Cronenberg's images could therefore be taken in themselves as content moving against the impulse to 'strip back' meaning highlighted earlier as an integral part of how the films can be understood as progenitors of the visceral; but only if we discount the resistance to the post-Eisensteinian discipline of montage. Rather than cutting faster, even as some of his

contemporaries do, Cronenberg's shots are measured, sometimes even languorous. Compared to, for instance, Ridley Scott's *Robin Hood* (2010) in which shots of less than two seconds are common, allowing views on scenes of both intense action and conversation from a multitude of angles, Cronenberg's shots, even when portraying moments of intense excitement, are much 'fuller.' As an example is the composition of fifty-eight shots that describe the battle of fists and knives between the Russian gangster Nikolai and two assassins in the sauna scene from *Eastern Promises*. These shots are stretched out across three minutes, indicating that on average each shot is over three seconds long. Moreover, each shot, rather than exhibiting an angle on the action very different from the ones around it, discovers a viewpoint only one or two degrees different than its neighbours, at some points displaying a technique not dissimilar to a jump cut.[26] What is created is not an event punctuated by the kinaesthesia of editing, but understood as one continuous event unseasoned by multi-angled and fragmentary cuts.

Eastern Promises can be charged, of course, in its avowal of continuity, with furthering an almost classical style of cinematic discourse, of merely being slightly out of fashion. As his images are empty as signifieds, however, Cronenberg's classicism is only subjunctive. His metaphors are intended as universal signifieds, but as Bateman contests, "individual images that make up film are infinitely variable in a way that, for example, words are not." In this way the argument for metaphor suffers the same fate as Metz's bracket syntagma in the face of the visceral: "Within this infinite variation, how can an interpreter of a film know when something *meaningfully* 'different' or 'similar' has been said?" (2007: 19.) The bracket syntagma aims for a unity of meaning within a sequence (modern love in *Une Femme Mariee*); and, according to what he says at least, so does Cronenberg. But the affect, as in the pared down performances of the 'actor-mannequins' in *Crash* and the creatures of *Naked Lunch*, is to invoke emptiness. In an argument against "intensified continuity" (Bordwell, 2005: 26), James (2010) discovers that the "constantly changing viewpoint and fast-cutting style [...] has made watching the best American action dramas – such as Michael Mann's *Public Enemies* (2009) and Martin Scorsese's *The Departed* (2006) – a more fragmentary pleasure". He continues: "The current speed of cutting destroys much of an actor's performance; we only have time to register facial expression fleetingly." (35.) In Cronenberg's

cinema, meanwhile, the edits are slower, but the meaning of the shot is indefinable. Yet there is a difference between the cinematic artefact developed under the aegis of intensified continuity and Cronenberg's cinema of emptiness; and this difference is instituted in their respective attitudes towards the primacy of the signified as opposed to the signifier. Intensified continuity works towards an end which has already been established (the narrative). Cronenberg's cinema removes elements as it is transferred from script to celluloid – elements of performance, of emotion – in pursuit of purity, of the metaphor of writing. This is evident in the process of special effects design in his films. One of the supplementary features on the DVD of *Naked Lunch* is a gallery of prototypes for the insect-typewriters used in the film. What is apparent from the gestation of the design for the 'Clark Nova' is that the finished product is in many ways no less 'prototypical' than the versions that came before. It is, indeed, in some ways far less elegant than its predecessors.

Figure 4: Elegance: An early Clark Nova prototype from *Naked Lunch* (David Cronenberg, 1992 [© Twentieth Century Fox/The Criterion Collection]) Screen capture

The point here is that at no stage in the development of these special effects is there a sense of evidentiary 'meaning' materialising from the movement of one development to the next. The 'final' Clark Nova as it appears in the film supplants all the others, just as it invokes emptiness. Thus, as defined by Barthes, the insect typewriter is the opposite of "fullness", which is "remembrance", the "neurotic form" of "repetition", and the "social form" of the "stereotype"; the insect typewriter is instead, emptiness,

which is "closer to the new, the return of the new (which is the contrary of repetition)." It is what Barthes calls "the self-consistence of the world" (1971: 117-118).

Working against the Metzian *grande syntagmatique*, what Cassavetes and Cronenberg's *oeuvres* inhabiting, rather, is the realm of the *paradigmatique*. The paradigm, indeed, becomes a useful illustrative model of how their cinemas' employment of techniques that invoke lists and emptiness operate in directionally different ways to the path of narrative 'sense'. Metz's *syntagmatique* exploits the semiological thesis of the syntagm as an ordering of "sequential" and "causal" relationships (Brooks and Warren, 1972: 44); in this case, images. However, the actual images which are visible in the *grande syntagmatique* are selected from all the possible images that are available, what Cubitt identifies as "the paradigmatic axis of substitutions" (2004: 72). Bateman, indeed, advances the importance of the paradigmatic axis to Metz's thought: "the grande syntagmatique is actually a paradigmatic description of syntagmatic possibilities; that is, it is expressing alternatives between possibilities" (2007: 23).

The importance of the paradigmatic axis to Cassavetes and Cronenberg's visceral cinema is that – as illustrated by its presence in graphical form as a vertical line of selection from which the horizontal line of progress draws its artefacts – both filmmakers halt the progression of cause and effect. Thus, as demonstrated in this chapter, as the process of selection is halted, sequential, causal and temporal relationships are interrupted or prohibited from being furthered. How this can happen has already been discovered through Cassavetes' *Husbands* and many more instances from Cronenberg. Both directors are consequently united in allowing circumstances that lead to the foregrounding of the paradigmatic ahead of the syntagmatic. The paradigmatic here is found in sequences in which an arhythmic camera and cutting techniques describe a perpetual yet placeless singing contest; or in the creation of a typewriter fused with a bug that is nonetheless, conceptually at least, indistinguishable from (or less elegant and meaningful than) the prototype typewriter-bugs that preceded it in the pre-production phase of a film's making.

This chapter has considered some of the ways in which certain theories of language are utilised by film as a sense-making medium. In particular it has suggested how

such theories endorse film as a medium which is naturally, and primarily, a vessel through which narratives evolve. Cassavetes' 'lists' and Cronenberg's 'emptiness,' this chapter has suggested, problematise the idea of narrative's primacy, by interrupting the contiguity of 'this-follows-that'. Therefore, the meanings generated by the film's aesthetic are no longer there to service narrative. The next chapter will discuss how, even though the halting of narrative may itself be construed as an aesthetic device identified with certain techniques employed by 'spectacular' genres of film, the visceral resists even these interpretations. Cassavetes and Cronenberg's films will be integral to this understanding, of course. However, the chapter will also look at the video game in order to elucidate arguments for how the aesthetic of the moving image can deny not only the intellectual meanings of narrative, but also the direct, immediate meanings engendered in the theatre of the spectacle.

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[1] Prior to its official release on DVD, my own copy of the 'shorter' *Husbands* was on VHS: a recording of the film broadcast in 1989 on the UK terrestrial channel BBC2 as a tribute to Cassavetes following his death earlier that year

[2] For example the season of the director's films shown at the Irish Film Institute in 2007. Alongside *Husbands*, the week-long retrospective included screenings of *A Woman Under the Influence*, *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie*, *Opening Night*, *Love Streams*, *Faces*, *Minnie and Moskowitz*, *Shadows* and even *Mikey and Nicky*, the 'unofficial' Cassavetes film. Directed by Elaine May and starring Cassavetes and Peter Falk, its irregular pacing and unrefined aesthetic has the hallmarks of a Cassavetes project by proxy

[3] Extras: a feature-length commentary by Cassavetes biographer Marshall Fine and a 30-minute documentary on the making of the film

[4] Ridley Scott, in his introduction to *Blade Runner: the Final Cut* indicates that this is, finally, his preferred version of the film, indicating that it supersedes all other prior versions, including the *Director's Cut*

[5] Gena Rowlands, married to Cassavetes, threatened the Cassavetes biographer and scholar with legal action if the original print of *Shadows* were ever released. Carney located the 1958 version and projected it once at the Rotterdam Film Festival in 2004. Details of the dispute from Carney's perspective is available on his website: <http://people.bu.edu/rcarney/discoveries/discrowlands.shtml>

[6] Estimated at 90 feet per minute, the 'complete' footage of *Husbands* runs at 129 hours

[7] It is worth noting at this point that Cronenberg's films have a fairly sizeable Blu-Ray presence, despite the format being relatively new. More recent films, such as *A History of Violence* and *Eastern Promises* have been optioned in high definition 'as standard' as they were released in the years following the format's inception, but both *Fast Company* (1978) and *The Fly* (1986) have also been remastered for the Blu-ray market. Those Cassavetes films that are available are still only available on DVD

[8] Released through 20th Century Fox in 2006

[9] DVD released in 2000

[10] Released through Criterion as "The Criterion Collection" in 2003

[11] The precise quote is "The Photograph does not necessarily say *what is no longer*, but only and for certain *what has been*" (Barthes, 1981: 85)

[12] In the chapter on special effects. For the moment it is worth noting Barthes' declaration that, in beginning his project on the 'nature' of photography, "I decided I liked Photography *in opposition* to the Cinema" (1981: 3)

[13] Barthes cites examples: "material essences (necessitating the physical, chemical, optical study of the Photography), and the regional essences (deriving, for instance, from aesthetics, from History, from sociology)" (1981: 21)

[14] This is absolutely my own experience of screening the film to students. Even when playing the shorter version, response to *Husbands*, while engendering some support, is often antagonistic. After one screening to a group of Further Education students, the film met with comments such as, "If I'd seen this at the cinema I would have walked out," and, "The people who made this film should be beaten with sticks"

[15] There are certain comparisons here to Steve McQueen's *Hunger* (2008). Here, McQueen's background as a video artist is applied to narrative form, the re-enaction of events around the hunger strike of Bobby Sands. Convicted by the British criminal courts for possession of firearms, and a known member of the Irish Republican Army, Sands died in Maze Prison, Long Kesh, Northern Ireland in 1981. McQueen's aesthetic concentrates much more on the conditions of Maze life – long, still camera shots of urine seaping and converging from beneath a corridor of prison doors; or of shit being smeared and sculpted on harsh cell walls – than on the details of Sands' case. These shots, alongside the gradual deterioration of Sands' health as he becomes increasingly emaciated, do of course serve a purpose: they are expressions of appalling hardship and deterioration. Moreover, in coming from a filmmaker who has stepped in from the margins of video art, they become lyrical testaments, deliberations on the nature of beauty in art. The spiral shapes etched into the faeces on the prison walls can, for example, recall the 'land art' sculptures of Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970). They can of course also suggest the 'maze' of Maze Prison itself. These games with the aesthetic language of film are a constituent part of a largely non-narrative work made by a racognised member of the art community

[16] Commentators such as Gunning (2004) and Keathley (2006) have noted that Bazin is here adopting a Peircean approach to the question of cinematic and photographic ontology, particularly in his discovery of indexical links between the object photographed and its appearance on film *apropos* the relationship between the death mask and the subject from which it is molded. In studying Bazin, it may seem that the pragmatic approach to the reading of sign-systems is the only way to interpret his observations. Yet as shall be discovered in this chapter, particularly in considering Bazin alongside Barthes and other structuralist/post-structuralist theorists, such interpretations are far from fixed

[17] Cassavetes was of Greek heritage, with an interest in Greek philosophy. His father was a member of the Greek Orthodox Church, and wrote books on Greek theology and history

[18] Ginsberg's *Howl* is now the subject of a biopic directed by Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman (2010). It weaves together the court case that puts the poem on trial as an 'indecent' publication, the public reading of the poem by Ginsberg in 1955, and an animated interpretation of sections of the poem by a former Ginsberg collaborator, Eric Drooker. See Clarke (2011) on the gestation of this project. As with any film adaptation of a poem, the challenge arrives at the moment the visual image is juxtaposed with the spoken word; finding the thin line between lyricism and literalism that does not attempt to 'tell' what the poem means. It is a challenge that heakens back to Harry Watt and Basil Wright's images that correspond with Auden's *Night Mail* (1936), through to Brian Hill's dramatisation of Simon Armitage's *Killing Time: the Millennium Poem* (1999), among many others. Here is an interesting genre of films *vis a vis* the visceral: films that attempt to replicate the autonomy of the experience of poetry without creating a verbatim, visual transcript of the poem

[19] Cronenberg discusses this at length on the director's commentary track for *The Fly*. He also takes issue with the shot from the transformed scientist's point of view, looking at the image of his screaming wife through his compound eyes. On screen the effect of 'looking through the eyes of a fly' duplicates identical shot of the screaming woman's face as a mosaic that crosses the screen. Cronenberg states how wrong this is, and makes no sense from a biological point of view. Rather than duplicating the image, he suggests the compound eye would actual show just one image, but that it would be faceted

[20] Japan, now (and in particular Tokyo), is realised in films such as *Lost in Translation* (Sofia Coppola, 2003) as an entirely interior technological capital, literalising Le Corbusier's early maxim about modern architecture as a machine for living in (2008)

[21] The interview is an extra on the DVD release of *Waltz with Bashir*, distributed by Artificial Eye

[22] See <http://spiderthemovie.com/spider.html> (Accessed 9 January 2010). This is the official website for Cronenberg's *Spider*, the main page of which demonstrates this metonymy

[23] The connection between Newman and Cronenberg goes deeper than this mutual understanding of emptiness. Indeed, the *Red, Yellow and Blue* canvases and *At the Suicide of the Last Jew in the World in the Last Cinema in the World* are united by each *auteur*'s more-or-less explicit acknowledgement of their heritage as descendents of Eastern European/Russian Jewish immigrants. Newman's parents were born in Lomza, Russian Poland (see *The Barnett Newman Foundation* website at <http://www.barnettnewman.org/chronology.php> (Accessed 7 March 2011); Cronenberg's grandparents on both his mother's and father's side were from Lithuania (Eisner, 2003: 23). As noted by Hess (1971) and Baigell (1994) Newman's 'stripe' paintings are derived in part from Newman's reading, and his personal understanding of the branch of mystical Judaism known as Kabbalah. Interestingly, despite not feeling "part of" Judaism (in Rodley, 1997: 3), Cronenberg does make his cultural, religious and racial heritage clear in his short film, to the point of casting himself as 'the last Jew.'

[24] It is unfortunately not possible to reevaluate Metz's *grande syntagmatique* here in too direct a way, yet it is interesting to read his influence in articles not necessarily written for a cine-literate audience (Bateman has his piece published in *Semiotica*) even as it resurfaces in academic writings on language and film studies (Branigan's *Projecting a Camera*)

[25] Perhaps not the only one, but the most ubiquitous. We might also mention, for example, the cinema of attractions, posited by Gunning (2006 [1986]) and Musser (2006a [1994]), among others, as the period of gestation through which early cinema evolved from a condition of pure spectacle to

a sense-making medium. It is possible to claim here, as Tomasovic (2006) suggests, that the cinema of attractions has resurfaced in the digital era. Films such as Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man* films, for example (2002, 2004, 2007), can be seen as foregrounding the spectacular possibilities of the medium as it enjoys the newfound freedom that virtual effects such as Computer Generated Images allow. The visceral, I would argue, does not correspond to the cinema of attractions as – in the case of narrative – the conscious foregrounding of effects does not allow accident to enter into the frame. The attractions, in other words, are as preordained as the sense-making logic of 'this-follows-that' in the narrative film. I touch on these issues in the "Effects" chapter here

[26] In fact, reinforcing this argument is the extended duration of the final shot in this sequence. As Nikolai rests after believing he has dispatched both assassins, he slithers across the tiles in the sauna, only to be grabbed by one of the men. Nikolai kills the man by stabbing him in the eye. This final death takes place as one shot, its slowness in fact predicted by the composition of similarly-positioned shots in the previous section of the fight

CHAPTER FOUR

EFFECTS

The previous chapter discussed how both the Cassavetes and Cronenberg film, through a resistance to language, denies the meanings that narrative cinema is founded upon. Here, the focus is on how the visceral, as evident in the Cassavetes and Cronenberg film, also resists the thrills of the spectacle, as found in such cultural artefacts as the action film, the horror movie or the video game. Indeed, the video game too will be cited as an example of a medium that has a capacity to thwart both narrative sense and spectacular thrills in an effort to support the claim that the visceral evades such conclusive aims of cinema to stimulate the viewer's need for meaning or excitement.

SPECTACLE

The primary focus of this chapter is what may broadly be called the special effect. To be sure, because of the apparent genre trappings of many of Cronenberg's films, the choice of actual special effects films is much more varied than in the case of Cassavetes, whose *oeuvre* consists of largely real actors in real locations. Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to state there are no special effects in Cassavetes' films. Broadly defined as a particular set of industrial techniques created by particular members of a film's crew, there are special effects in the explosive gunplay of *Gloria* (1980) and the blood that dampens the protagonist's shirt at the end of *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie* (1976/1978). *Love Streams* (1984), discussed here, also contains a couple of sequences that verge on the spectacular.

However, it is certainly the case that Cronenberg's special effects – in their genre context – are more prevalent and blatant, the cause of many of his films' controversies. In order to discuss these special effects as pertaining to the visceral – as ineffable aspects – of Cronenberg's films, it will be necessary to separate them from their ideologically-inflected presence as tropes of genre and offensiveness. To this end one film will be discussed more expansively than others: *Videodrome*

(1982). The choice is far from arbitrary: it is a film that is written about extensively, particularly in narrative and psychoanalytic terms (see for example, Beard, 2006); so the decision to include it as an example of the visceral in cinema is an attempt to acknowledge that even in the case of a frequently studied text, there are elements that continue to escape meaning.

This, after all, is what the visceral is about: elements that escape rationalisation. In this way it shares many aspects of what Barthes, in *Camera Lucida* (1981), calls the *punctum*, a term alluded to briefly in earlier chapters here. In its originary formulation – that is, as Barthes defines it – the term is applicable only to photography; thus, my main task here is to reconfigure Barthes' meaning so that the *punctum* can share much of the attributes of the visceral. The prime technique for achieving this is to apply the art historian Michael Fried's re-reading of Barthes, which serves a dual purpose: first by opening up the possibility of a theory of the *punctum* to the other arts; and second, by introducing a concept – theatricality – that can also be used to define how one experiences special effects.

Used alongside theory more directly applicable to cinema, theatricality becomes a way of navigating how the special effect differs to the visceral: Sean Cubitt's discussion of digital and analogue media becoming an integral touchstone here and allowing me to offer an initial analysis of the first example of a special effect, in Cronenberg's *Videodrome*. With this in mind, I allude briefly to Deleuze's theory of faceicity and faceification; which seems in its intent on the description of surfaces, to be unsuccessful in apprehending the core of the visceral. With this in mind I introduce more of Barthes' theories in an effort to find an alternative way of acknowledging the limitations of language to describe the visceral. Cassavetes' *Love Streams* is cited as a further example of this, reaching a moment in its drama in which anything is possible, thereby retaining an uneasy relationship between viewer and filmed image.

The two directors are then brought together via a video game[1] – *The Path* – which is chosen as its strong narrative has echoes of a very familiar story (Little Red Riding Hood) which can nonetheless be subverted by the visceral; yet also, by being a video game, is useful in illustrating how digitally-created texts can be reevaluated, despite their apparent 'perfection' as sites that allow in the visceral as an ineffable, and

'meaning-less' construct. As a coda, then, *The Path* further equates Cassavetes' and Cronenberg's works with the visceral.

The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to distinguish the visceral special effect from the spectacular special effect using two films that appear incommensurate precisely on the level of 'illusionism' as defined by the insertion of "synthetic elements" into a "pro-filmic" schema (North, 2008: 2). Cronenberg's *Videodrome* is therefore 'about' the special effect (a part of the director's vision – in the horror/science fiction tradition – "to show the unshowable, to speak the unspeakable" (Rodley, 1997: 43; Browning, 2007: 35) in its depiction of exotic and disturbing forms that combine the organic and the mechanical; while Cassavetes' *Love Streams* continues the director's "emphasis on the physicality of interpersonal relations" through the direct recording of performances in real locations (in this case Cassavetes' own home[2] (Kouvaros, 2004: x)).

However, in Cronenberg's film one can see the dark reflection of *Love Streams*: through an analysis of the films in the light (and shadow) of the other, one finds references to how the special effect, and the term 'special effect', can transcend even the limits of 'unshowability' as understood as a consequence of intent. On the level of special effects as routinely defined in cinema – such as "filmed illusion" (North, 2008: 2) – *Love Streams* does in fact include what may be termed 'spectacular' sequences outside the pyrotechnic level of performance such as a dream in which a car chases one of the characters, hurtling through the air in slow-motion, consequently crushing him underneath. And in the large amount of theory written about *Videodrome* the effects are seen as an expression of a deeper artistic vision (indicating "the filmmaker's continuing hunt to discover the ground zero of desire and prohibition", for instance (Beard, 2006: 121)). To hypothesise then, one may say that *Videodrome* is an intellectual film with visceral effects; and that *Love Streams* is a visceral film with spectacular effects.

ATTRACTIONS

As previously stated, the main source for the analysis of the visceral as it occurs in the spectacular sequences of Cassavetes and Cronenberg's cinemas will be Barthes' writings. However, it is worth briefly stating here the place of the spectacular in

cinema as an antithetical agent to the narrative tradition in cinema. Most pertinently here is the application of Gunning's "cinema of attractions," which is understood as a rejoinder to the sense-making narratives that dominates readings of popular cinema. Against this "hegemony of narrative" (2006 [1986]: 381) the cinema of attractions is seen as an oppositional mode of filmmaking which flourished in the earliest days of the medium (in other words, from its inception to as far as the second decade of the new century). The cinema of attractions, Gunning writes, "directly solicits spectator attention, inciting visual curiosity, and supplying pleasure through an exciting spectacle – a unique event [...] that is of interest in itself." These include, but are not restricted to, "gags, vaudeville numbers or recreations of shocking or curious incidents [such as] executions [and] current events" (384). Gunning agrees that, despite being subsumed by narrative concerns, the cinema of attractions persists in the "Spielberg-Lucas-Coppola cinema of effects" (387). Tomasovic agrees, making explicit that "while the concept of the cinema of attractions entered the academic world to redefine early cinema, a series of young contemporary film directors forgot about film history and created their own style of visually aggressive films" (2006: 309).[3]

The importance of a theory of the cinema of attractions can also be applied readily to video games, as it appears as "an apposite term to describe [their] thrills [...] because they, too, create [...] a different contact space between player and the screen" (Elsaesser, 2006: 208). The contact space here is very different to that which exists between viewer and screen at the level of narrative. Nonetheless, Wolf (2011), taking an historical approach, sees in video games the capacity to move beyond the cinema of attractions 'phase' of development and become narrative media; a sign, that is of the medium's maturation from a distracting pastime to an artform.[4] Nonetheless, as it stands, the concept of the cinema of attractions continues to infiltrate narrative cinema and video games in the form of the spectacle. However the visceral, as I make clear in this chapter, cannot be acquainted with the spectacle of the attraction as – after the definitions of the term posited by Gunning, et al – the visceral is not an intentional facet of the image. It neither thrills nor excites the viewer. Thus, as we move towards the Barthesian analysis of the visceral as it appears in the (otherwise) spectacular sequence, we shall see how – in both the films of Cassavetes and Cronenberg, and in the video game – it undermines the

possibilities for 'attraction' found in early cinema and the entertainment's digital realm.

DIGITAL

In her volume on the history of new media, *Always Already New*, Lisa Gitelman writes of the progress of technologies of communication as a process that begins with the user's "self-conscious" attitude towards the new device, and ends with the same user using the same device "without thinking about it" (2008: 5). This adjustment of human attitudes towards technology – from "self-evidence" to "transparency" – is a necessity for any technological enterprise from the development of telephony to the invention of the video games console. However, an inevitable result of the advancement of such technologies is the perceived obsolence and antiquity of the "protocols" that came before:

> The success of all media depends at some level on inattention or 'blindness' to the media technologies themselves [...] in favour of attention to the phenomena, 'the content,' that they represent for users' edification or enjoyment. When one uses antique media [...], when one encounters unfamiliar protocols, like using a pay telephone abroad, or when media break down, [...] forgotten questions about whether and how media do the job can bubble to the surface. (6)

Of course, "old media remain meaningful", and Gitelman cites "medieval manuscripts, eight-track tapes, [...] rotary phones, [...] semaphores, stereoscopes and punchcard programming" as examples of archaic modes of communication which are nonetheless "recognisable as media." Yet "Neither silent film nor black-and-white television seems right anymore, except as a throwback. Like acoustic (nonelectronic) analogue recordings, they just don't do the job" (4).

The visceral as it appertains to cinema can similarly be regarded as a condition of the moving image that does not 'seem right,' which 'just doesn't do the job.' It is an unnecessary part of the film, yet its presence cannot be ignored, its self-evidence working against the transparency of the host narrative. The unmotivated inclusion of the singing contest in Cassavetes' *Husbands* and the starkly incomplete fusion of insect and Clark-Nova typewriter in Cronenberg's *Naked Lunch* mentioned in the previous chapter are examples of instances in these directors' *oeuvres* that negate the 'edification' and 'enjoyment' of the fictional worlds presented to the viewer. This is

an analogical point, of course: the visceral equivalent, for convenience's sake, to the old technology that disrupts the understanding of the consumer who has moved on to more streamlined methods of 'usability.'

The connection between technology and the visceral (new media as transparency of cinematic fictional narratives; old media as the ineffability of the image) goes deeper than this metaphorical level suggests, however. As Gitelman points out, the advancement of media is run as much by ideological as a technological forces; and she recognises that the twin forces of "nature" and "culture" (4) are convenient "myths" whereby each term can be taken for the other, dependant on its emphasis in historical terms (3). Exemplified by Gitelman's understanding of history as denoting "both the thing we are doing to the past and the past we are doing it to" (4), it echoes Barthes' sentiments, "It is when history is denied that it is most assuredly at work" (1981: 2). Applied to the specific realm of technological advance, the "sequence of displacements and obsolences" that signals the success of each medium (Gitelman, 2008: 8; Crary, 1999: 13) is nonetheless perceived at the level of the user as "unchanging" (Gitelman, 2008: 8). The devices themselves are seen as "immutable objects with given, self-defining properties" (Lastra, 2000: 13; in Gitelman, 2008: 8): they are the centre of culture. In other words, the objects are essential components of history as it is understood now, "around which changes swirl, and to or from which history proceeds" (Gitelman, 2008: 8). Ideology discredits the efficacy of technologies that precede the most current examples available in a consumerist society.

Through this ideological lens, the self-evidence of old technology exacerbates the presence of the visceral. This becomes most obvious in the use of special effects created in an age before digital techniques were available. Of course, in a fast-changing digital age (8) even relatively recent Computer Generated Images (CGI) can seem outdated,[5] so that pre-digital, mechanical effects will appear even further removed from the possibilities offered by contemporary technology. Yet this does not automatically mean that all instances of pre-digital effects uniformly access the visceral. This would be to assume that the visceral is an entity that rolls against the times – an historical fact of cinema that only becomes evident as it becomes unfashionable. The visceral resists such essentialist assumptions. Rather, the

mechanical special effects that access the visceral remain as unpalatable as when they first appeared; while the antiquity of the techniques used to render them serve both to signal the constructedness of their making and to resist the sense of nostalgia (for craftsmanship, for the signifieds of a painstaking, manual vocation) that would otherwise be evident to a viewer watching them in the digital age; what Rombes (2005) suggests is the antidote to the perfection of the digital image, and what Marks (2002) refers to as "analogue nostalgia" (152). It is in the films of Cassavetes and Cronenberg that the special effect remains a source of displeasure in an era of computer generated perfection.

HORRORS

At its most controversial, the special effect is so resolutely visceral it appears to demand no more of language than to analyse the techniques of replication. Its locus of representation within genres containing both explicit and loudly declarative iconographies (horror, the action film), the special effect at its most extreme depicts the raw physicality of transgression: the body transformed by violence.

Cronenberg's *Videodrome*, for instance, in its aesthetics of lo-fi science fiction and graphic horror, contains shocking images in accordance with all the director's genre work since *Shivers* (1974); which set a template for controversies to come by being labelled "the most perverse, disgusting, repulsive film" ever seen by contemporary Canadian film critic Robert Fulford (in Rodley, 1997: 51).

Fulford's condemnation of *Shivers* repeats well-worn and inconclusive debates on audience reception and receptiveness, screen violence and the shape of the horror movie within the context of North American filmmaking. What it fails to achieve, however, is an engagement with what the Cronenbergian special effect does within the *modus* of representation; it stands out in the critical imagination as merely an illuminated tableau designed to shock the viewer.[6] Then again, as Cronenberg's *auteur* status is continually validated by writers on feminism and psychoanalysis in film (Creed, 1998; Beard 2005) or adaptation studies (Browning, 2007), the visceral aspect of the special effect (and its affect) is continually contravened in the pursuit of *meaning*. In each case the special effect is viewed teleologically, based entirely on its assumed function: as shock; as theory. In such an environment the special effect

is seen as ancillary to the more important aspects of the film, in particular narrative. This point is encapsulated by the director's experiences of working both with and without the backing of a major Hollywood studio: "The general attitude at Universal [the financiers of *Videodrome*] was 'We know you've got some talent that's quite unique. If only we could channel it into the mainstream it could be fantastic, but you keep going off into this little side trickle'" (in Rodley, 1997: 119).

The importance of Cronenberg's films to visceral studies is in the dual attraction of the special effect, in its ability to fascinate and repulse the viewer. For this reason it is necessary to employ theory which values the complexity of the relationship between image and spectator; between what is seen and what is felt. Barthes' *Camera Lucida* achieves this, but an attempt to apply its conclusions to cinema is automatically burdened by the book's apparent bias towards the still photograph.

CAMERA LUCIDA

One problem here is that the special effect is perceived as a product of design, and despite technological advancements in its craft, it remains evidence of the work of what Tom Gunning, discussing early cinema, names the "*monstrator*, one who shows, a showman" (1990a: 99-100); and as Norman M. Klein observes in his overview of Carl Lewis Gregory's *Motion Picture Photography*, published in 1920, special effects are wholly intentional, mere manipulations of the image to trick the eye of the viewer: "some tricks are meant to be noticed; others are meant to stay hidden. And thirdly, some are simply part of how scenes are assembled so they follow each other; that is, they are aesthetic cues, like turning a page, or the actor walking forward to do a monologue." (Klein, 2004: 223.) Gregory uses the term "fake" to describe special effects, and it is this problem of inauthenticity as an essential component of the cinema's aesthetic praxis that faces a theory of the visceral as special effect. (223; see also Gregory, 1927 [1920]: 267.)

Gregory's concept of the fake becomes immediately inconsistent with Cassavetes' and Cronenberg's attitudes on the possibilities of cinema: Cassavetes seeking to capture a "sense of elation at that moment of accidental discovery, when the actor connects unexpectedly to the script in a way he hasn't before and acting moves from make-believe to real art" (Fine, 2005: 77); and Cronenberg looking for unconscious

truths through showing the unshowable. These attitudes can be found in the films: Harry's violent reaction to be called a "phoney" in *Husbands* (Cassavetes, 1970) and Cronenberg stating that in his adaptation of William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* (1991) he wanted "to really convey the experience of writing" and that the only way he felt he could do that was by being "courageous [...] turn[ing] it inside out and make it physical and exterior" (In Levin, 2003: 535). The creature effects and 'shocks' of *Naked Lunch* henceforth become metaphors for the struggle and craft of writing.

The special effect as visceral phenomenon in the films of these directors can be approached through a deeper analysis of how Barthes distinguishes between photography and cinema. He writes, of the photograph, that it exists as

> the result of a perverse confusion between two concepts: the Real and the Live: by attesting that the object has been real, the photograph surreptitiously induces belief that it is alive, because of that delusion which makes us attribute to Reality an absolutely superior, somehow eternal value; but by shifting this reality to the past ('this-has-been'), the photograph suggests that it is already dead. (Barthes, 1981: 79)

This "return of the dead" (9) is for Barthes photography's "inimitable feature"; what he calls its "*noeme*" (79). Yet what should be immediately obvious in the current discussion is that cinema too, as Jonathan Auerbach notes, "is haunted by death" (Auerbach, 2007: 129). Barthes, however, is unrepentant:

> [T]he photograph's *noeme* deteriorates when this Photograph is animated and becomes cinema: in the Photograph, something *has posed* in front of the tiny hole and has remained there forever (that is my feeling); but in cinema, something *has passed* in front of this same tiny hole: the pose is swept away and denied by the continuous series of images [...] Here again, from a phenomenological viewpoint, the cinema begins to differ from the Photograph; for the (fictional) cinema combines two poses: the actor's 'this-has-been' and the role's. (78-79; see also Auerbach, 2007: 129)

Nonetheless, all is not lost. As Auerbach points out, the "first and last parenthetical asides" here are "especially telling":

> By adding 'that is my feeling' Barthes suggests that, despite the term *noeme*, this is not an ontological definition of the medium but an affect-orientated one that depends on the subjective relation of a particular image and a particular viewer [...] This is why, to invoke *Camera Lucida*'s famous distinction, the *punctum* Barthes detects in a single old photograph of his mother as a child remains only a *studium* for the rest of us, why he refuses to reproduce the image for his readers. Second

> [...] Barthes' struggle to distinguish photography from movies, to deny film [...] the loss and morbidity he finds in the still photo, depends on a specific *kind* of cinema – fictional narratives made up of actors playing clearly demarcated roles. (129-130.)

Auerbach's defence of the *punctum*'s potential in cinema resonates in his focus on early examples of the moving image. The *punctum*'s apparition, manifest in the embryonic stages of film's development into competency should therefore not be any surprise (particularly when one remembers early cinema's classification as 'primitive'), since it occurs, as Barthes writes of the photograph, before "Society [can] temper the madness which keeps threatening to explode in the face of whoever looks at it" (Barthes, 1981: 117). However, while I have up to now consciously restricted my observations in this chapter on films and theories (outside of those of and about Cassavetes and Cronenberg) concerning cinema's first blossoming, it is not to ally the *punctum* (and by extension the visceral) with the supposed accidents of primitivism, but to understand that the 'cinematic *punctum*' (this is the only time I shall use this term) occurs not as an unexpected side-effect of the design process, but as a necessary condition of certain strands of filmmaking that may otherwise be construed as inconvenient, atypical, aberrant.

That the visceral is a result of aberrant practice rather than the accidents of primitivism emphasises an effect achieved through certain conditions of production, rather than something that may be dismissed as a 'natural' occurrence. Gunning's rejection of how a particular point of view towards the inconsistencies of early cinema is a useful indicator of how the visceral (and Barthes' *punctum*) cannot be swiftly eradicated through a dependence on certain historical readings: "I felt it was important not to see these anomalies as primitive mistakes groping towards the later established ideal of match cutting and diegetic unity but as indications of another direction in film narrative than that of later dominant cinema, a road not taken by the major film industries" (Gunning, 1990b: 86).

THEATRE

Here it is relevant to present Michael Fried's 2005 critique of *Camera Lucida*, "Barthes' *punctum*". Fried's thoughts on Barthes and photography are very much a return to themes already discussed by the author in his seminal essay on Minimalism,

"Art and Objecthood" (1967); in particular his theories around the bond that exists between the spectator and what he chooses to call the "literalist" artworks of "Donald Judd, Robert Morris, Carl Andre, and Tony Smith"[7]: "What mattered […] was the beholder's experience of the work or rather of the total situation in which the work was encountered, a situation that […] virtually by definition, *includes the beholder* […] The literalist work, in other words, was incomplete without the experiencing subject" (Fried, 2005: 572; emphasis in original; see also, Fried, 1967: 125).

There are a couple of observations worth noting with regard to Fried's essay. First, by acknowledging his interest in Barthes' book from the perspective of an art historian, Fried opens up debates on the *studium* and the *punctum* outside those concerning the photographic image. Summarising the *punctum*'s "imperative" as the ability "to evade, elide, or otherwise get round the photographer's intentions", which can be "known only in and through a particular viewer's subjective experience", Fried ties Barthes' terminology to a literalist concept of presence, whereby the artwork too "has no existence apart from [immanent] experience" (Fried, 2005: 573). In this sense the concepts behind *studium* and *punctum* may more readily apply themselves to the ontology of cinema. It should be no surprise, therefore that the *punctum* (and indeed Fried's literalism) can be provisionally allied with the visceral, in that each term points to a condition of the image that can arouse and wound the viewer.

It is necessary at this stage to factor in a second, but related point concerning Fried. As a critical term 'literalism' is largely pejorative: according to Fried, the minimalist reduction of art into basic three-dimensional forms has the effect of implying "endlessness", yet they are "endless [only] in the way a road might be: if it were circular, for example"; so in essence "there is nothing there to exhaust" (Fried, 1967: 144): "the shape of the object, [and] the materials do not represent, signify, or allude to anything; they are what they are and nothing more." (143.) The viewer, in other words, creates meaning from the site of display and his own situation much more than from the art object alone; thus art is reduced through "inclusiveness" (144). With this in mind it may seem strange to discover Fried sides with Barthes, not only as the term *punctum* bespeaks a reliance on viewer response, but also seems to ignore a great deal of Barthes' writings on *jouissance* (*The Pleasure of the Text* (1973),[8]

Sade/Fourier/Loyola (1971)), on the 'writerly' as opposed to the 'readerly' text (*S/Z* (1970), "The Death of the Author" (1977)) and his thoughts on the ecstasy of the 'empty sign' (*Empire of Signs* (1970)). This is certainly worthy of some reflection, but only insofar as it illuminates an understanding of how the visceral relates to the special effect. In order to do this it is necessary to introduce an appellation used by Fried to further define literalism, one that corresponds to cinema, and its effect: this is the concept of theatricality.

For Fried, theatre defines a condition of art that denies heritage to the degree that it can no longer be considered as art: "The concepts of quality and value – and to the extent that these are central to art, the concept of art itself – are meaningful, or wholly meaningful, only *within* the individual arts. What lies *between* the arts is theatre" [9] (Fried, 1967: 142). That the arts (not just painting and sculpture, but music, literature, and so on) should remain discrete and not attempt to converge or diverge clearly accords with a particular interpretation of Greenbergian modernism already in decline in the late 1960s.[10] More importantly, it threatens to impoverish claims for the cinema as an art form. Fried writes, "The success, even the survival, of the arts has come increasingly to depend on their ability to defeat theatre" (139). Cinema, Fried notes, has no ordnance to join this fight, and it may seem at first to be because it resonates with too many aspects of the classical arts. However, this is to misunderstand Fried's definition of theatricality with regard to literalism as a hybridisation of *forms*. Film, in other words, is a hybridisation only insofar as it has *historically* evolved from Renaissance experiments in light and perspective (such as the lithopane, panorama and camera obscura), the staging and narrative of drama and literature and the development of a technology to record moving images:[11] it is, itself, a recognisable, ontological form; while its "phenomenology" may be "different", it is nonetheless an art form, because of rather than despite its derivation (Barthes, 1981: 123; Fried, 2005: 573). Literalism, meanwhile, has no unifying concept, except to be "interesting" (as mentioned by minimalist/literalist artist Donald Judd, in Fried, 1967: 142).

Film's 'mongrel' origins therefore have no bearing on its incapacity to defeat theatre: it is not that the medium is antitheatrical that is a problem for Fried, but that it is *non*theatrical: "cinema escapes, and therefore doesn't face the task of seeking to

defeat theatre". In his apologia for Barthes, Fried affirms *Camera Lucida* as a thesis on photography as antitheatrical praxis, "faced with the task of defeating theatre through the *punctum*" (Fried, 2005: 569). The *punctum* is present in the stillness of the photograph as something that takes "no notice of [a] beholder who [is] left to come to terms with [and] to make sense of [it] as best he [can]" in the same way a modernist painting's "extraordinary directness" and "structural indifference" to the beholder makes it "all the more perspicuous" (572). Literalism's project, compelled by a desire to be interesting, to be completed by the presence of an observer has no *punctum*: it contains within its hollow forms only the desire to be noticed. Film, meanwhile, is neither disinterested nor demonstrative. To defend this argument, Fried invokes Barthes' fondness for the "frontal pose" in photography against (narrative) cinema's inability to address the camera (that is, the antitheatrical versus the nontheatrical): "For the Photograph has this power [...] of looking me straight in the eye (here, moreover, is another difference: in film, no one ever looks at me: it is forbidden – by the Fiction)" (Fried, 2005: 569; Barthes, 1981: 111). In the direct gaze, "something is held back by something interior" as one is instructed to look at the camera, "this piece of black plastic". It is, for Barthes, a "paradox": when one is knowingly photographed, what does one think of (his example: "how can one have an intelligent air without thinking about anything intelligent")? (Fried, 2005: 571; Barthes, 1981: 172-4.)

By contrast, the filmed actor, in performance, avoids facing or acknowledging the lens: the air of the performance is not in any way ambiguous, only 'natural'. Branigan (1992) describes it thus:

> A glance implies an interaction with an object. In fact glances are so important to narrating a story world that the only glance that is generally avoided is a glance into the lens of the camera. A look into the camera breaks the diegesis because it makes the conventional reverse shot or eyeline match impossible. Such a match would reveal the camera itself; its absence would be just as revealing. (53)

This, of course, returns to issues raised by Auerbach earlier: the demarcation of a certain kind of cinema and its effects. However, rather than list instances of narrative cinema in which the camera's gaze is returned by the subject (and the list would be long![12]), in order to progress the argument for theatricality *vis-a-vis* the visceral effect it is interesting to note one further comment Fried utters on antitheatricality in

Camera Lucida. He writes, paraphrasing Barthes, "the best way to experience the *punctum* of a given photograph may be to shut one's eyes and let the crucial detail rise into one's consciousness." (2005: 573.) This is part of "what I add to the photograph and *what is nonetheless already there*." It is, furthermore, a facility of the observer that cannot be re-enacted with regard to cinema: "Do I add to the images in the movies? I don't think so; I don't have time: in front of the screen, I am not free to shut my eyes; otherwise, opening them again, I would not discover the same image; I am constrained to a continuous voracity [...]" (Barthes, 1981: 55).

These conditions: Barthes' *punctum* re-interpreted via Fried's conception of theatre and its antithesis are aspects of photography and the visual arts that are nonetheless present in the moving image; notable in one salient opposition: the visceral set against the special effect.

OBJECTS

It is easy, perhaps, to commit the law of theatre to the cinematic special effect, particularly in the light of the subsequent theories around the cinema of attractions mentioned earlier (indeed, in his discussion of cinematic spectacle in the 1890s, Musser (2006b) cites Fried's concept of theatricality as applied to art[13]). North, for instance, concludes that special effects "perform", "push to the front of the stage" and introduce "their own spectacular agenda" onto narratives (2008: 184). Special effects, in this way deliver some of the inclusiveness of minimalism: they demonstrate a formal praxis while serving no explicit narrative purpose; they are an excess at the level of the diegesis. Their existence is consequently paradoxical, since they exist on two levels for the viewer, "first, as a narrative taking place in a fantastic, yet believable world, involving credible characters, and second, as a sequence of spectacular effects. The most sophisticated special effects feature films depend on this tension between the two agendas" (Cook and Bernink, 2001: 60). And as a tension between agendas is precisely where Fried places what may be termed 'non art'. The hurtling car as an object of malice in *Love Streams* (mentioned above) fulfils partial motivation for the purposes of story (it is a projection of one character's embittered feelings over a rancorous divorce); on the other hand it revels

in the carnage (the slowing of the action, the car filmed from below, the bloody corpse). This, then, is the theatre of cinema.

Or is it? To answer this question fully one must discover how the visceral plays out in the theatre (and anti-theatre) of the special effect. It is here Fried's sources, facilitating his arguments *against* literalism become very important in the case *for* the visceral. An example of this can be found in a section from a 'Q and A' written by the artist Tony Smith on his six-foot cube, *Die*:

> Q: Why didn't you make it larger so that it would loom over the observer?
> A: I was not making a monument.
> Q: Then why didn't you make it smaller so that the observer could see over the top?
> A: I was not making an object. (Smith, in Fried, 1967: 128)

For Fried, this validates his theory of minimalism as a work that relies upon the participation of the observer: a cube of six feet in height is neither large enough to be impressive nor small enough to be scrutinised; it becomes "a surrogate person" (Fried, 2005: 128) with the same kind of presence as a real person. Applied to cinema, Smith's observations possess a weight that extend beyond their implications in "Art and Objecthood", and are in fact closer to Barthes' 'anti-theatrical' commitments in *Camera Lucida*.

For the minimalists, the physical scale of the object in relation to the observer is clearly important in a manner not shared by film, whose portability allows it to appear in differing formats, on different screens of different sizes; its status as 'monument' or 'object' or indeed 'surrogate person' therefore depends on ontological factors not shared with literalism. In this way cinema's movement from non-theatrical to theatrical and anti-theatrical praxes becomes dependent on verifying how shared language and exchange of definitions evolve between media. The theatre of presence, of a physical work that occupies a similar space to a person, becomes the monument of the special effect. As stated with regard to *Love Streams*, the spectacular special effect *is* theatrical, but not through any situational resemblance to the human body, but through what Cubitt (2004) describes as "an act of communion with another, higher and different mode of being". This being takes the place of a deity, a "cosmic" rather than a "divine" presence in a "secular epoch". This compares to literalism's theatricality in that despite its celestial aspirations, "it

is bounded both temporally and spatially." It is "artificial", a "lonely subject" in a "bounded cosmos"; "incomplete and needy" it is "destined to assimilate itself with the world from which it has so suddenly sprung" (251). This condition of the special effect has exacerbated in an era of digital technology, and its continuing quest for "seamlessness" with the analogue world (258).

The visceral, meanwhile, exists very much in its presence, but rather than being theatrical as it would be in the world of objects, it does not rely on interaction: it is, as with the modernist painting, merely there. Barthes' antitheatrical statements in *Camera Lucida* become important in illustrating how.

First, in his description of the impenetrability of the frontal gaze in photography, Barthes discovers a crucial difference between the still, indexical image and the moving one. While it is true this argument can be combated easily by indicating moments in narrative cinema in which the camera is addressed, this does not in itself constitute an encounter with the visceral. (It is worth noting here that neither Cassavetes nor Cronenberg engage with a grammar of film that so narrowly demarcates point of view.) As with Fried's analysis of the physical art object in terms of theatre, the crossover of Barthes' thoughts on photography into the world of film is not straightforward: it is a matter of concept. Discovering visceral presence in the moving image does not involve an actor's acknowledgement of the camera but in noticing the seams the digital image seeks to dissolve.

As Branigan states, a glance into the lens of the camera can only, at best, break the diegesis. This is not visceral. What is needed as a precondition of the visceral effect is the capacity to wound the observer in the manner of the *punctum*; something of the "disquieting","silent presence" of the literalist object that is come upon "unexpectedly" (Fried, 1967: 128) yet is antitheatrical precisely *because* its presence is not rehearsed, built, or pre-ordained. This is precisely what is discovered in the earliest of cinematic experiments. Of the "girls caught leaving the factory at the end of their shift" in *La sortie des usines Lumiere* (1895), Cubitt writes that the Lumieres record "an innocence of movement that never after could recur in front of the camera, [...] never to be repeated familiarities, all at the edge of a leisure that cannot be remade" (2004: 20). What the Lumieres have succeeded in capturing, in other

words, is an unforeseen effect, an appendage that is not strictly part of the image, but cannot subsist without it.

Within a widely understood definition of the special effect, this 'appendage' is a facet of the analogue image that is less likely to exist in the programming of computerised, digital process, or at least, not in the same way. As Richard Edlund, of the special effects company, Boss Films notes: "There is something about serendipity and the 'happy accident' that you can't get on a computer [...] the computer is very precise.[14] Every result must be thought of and programmed. It is often that unexpected happenstance that makes the shot real, and organic, and truly satisfying" (Richard Edlund, quoted by Cubitt, 2004: 251). Henceforth there exists an opposition: between the analogue image on one hand; and the digital image on the other. Cubitt skilfully manages to distinguish them through a discussion on their abilities to control a panoramic diegesis:

> Comparing, for example, the opening shots of the battlefield in Mankiewicz's *Cleopatra* [1963] with the panorama of Egypt in the first shot of *The Mummy* [Sommers, 1999], the chaos of the one and the order of the other, you can see the difference between a world which, if not freedom, then at least chance can persist and one in which there is no randomness . (251-2)

The insertion of the virtual crowd into the shot avoids the spontaneity garnered through the employment of extras. That, for the producers of *The Mummy*, the "sequence was undoubtedly far cheaper to shoot only begins to explain its appeal." Further appeal, of course, Cubitt confirms, can be found in the aggrandisement of the digital-as-God, no less potent for being bounded by the viewing screen. Continuing his discussion of the two films, however, Cubitt points out the wider implications of their aesthetics:

> Mankiewicz's Caesar wins the world, an ideological surrogate for our loss of it. Sommers's Mummy becomes the world, a force of nature that springs into existence at the moment of dissolution back into the fictive world that gives birth to him. The goal of the film is not [...] the restitution of order, but the assimilation of self into world, onscreen and in the auditorium. (252)

The analogue cannot help but be ideological; the digital seeks to transcend ideology in its quest for "utopian or dystopian" forms (260). This criticism of the digital

special effect is clearly in line with Fried's derogatory use of the term 'theatre': both minimalism and the digital are attempts at assimilating subject and spectator.

Does one therefore encounter the visceral in the analogue image? This appears likely, since the chaos of the image, its ability to accept the 'happy accident' enables the visceral to appear through the cracks, the seams of an image that is only partially under the filmmaker's control.

An analysis of an analogical special effect will be useful in illustrating this point.

VIDEODROME

Figure 5: *Videodrome* **(David Cronenberg, 1982 [©Universal/The Criterion Collection]) Screen capture**

Figure 6: *Videodrome* **(David Cronenberg, 1982 [©Universal/The Criterion Collection]) Screen capture**

Figure 7: *Videodrome* **(David Cronenberg, 1982 [©Universal/The Criterion Collection]) Screen capture**

Figure 8: *Videodrome* **(David Cronenberg, 1982 [©Universal/The Criterion Collection) Screen capture**

Figure 9: *Videodrome* **(David Cronenberg, 1982 [©Universal/The Criterion Collection]) Screen capture**

Figure 10: *Videodrome* **(David Cronenberg, 1982 [©Universal/The Criterion Collection]) Screen capture**

Figures 5-10 show six consecutive shots from Cronenberg's Videodrome illustrating the tragic synthesis of flesh and technology as protagonist Max Renn penetrates a "transformed realm of 'human reality'" (Beard, 2005: 132) induced by watching broadcast images of rape and murder on the eponymous snuff television station. The sequence of shots evidences analogue cinema's adeptness at employing sleight of hand to create its special effects: the transition from Renn actor James Woods' real hand (Figure 5) to a prosthetic hand (Figure 7), to a prosthetic hand equipped with wires that worm into the skin (Figure 9) to a final fusion of actor and prosthetics. The sequence invokes the thrill of a "conjuring show" (Pohl and Pohl, 1981, in Cubitt, 2004: 260) with each transition occurring on either side of a cut-away (Figures 6 and 8) that details Renn's reaction, including shot six (Figure 10), which begins on a close-up of Renn's face in profile, in pain but transfixed by what is being created here. The camera pans to follow his gaze, settling on the effect's completion: the casting of the human and the machine in one image. Cronenberg says in his director's commentary on this series of shots, which is "basically puppetry", that, because they were not filmed with CGI, there is a "lack of slickness. But there is a certain palpable quality to it: it's sculptural, it's physical, you could feel it; it was really there [...] It has weight."[15] The lack of slickness communicates through an inevitable reliance on editing to allow the effect to develop as much as the elastic texture of the prosthetic flesh and the sponginess of the cylindrical wires as Woods flexes his glued fingers against the gun butt in the final shot. The cut from make-up effect to reaction shot betrays this crude mechanism at work: the necessity of the cut offers no flexibility for a filmmaker who refuses to escape the diegesis; he

must observe the clichés of genre through the limitations of the reaction shot.[16] There is then a theatrical element at work, which occurs between those shots that describe the catalyst's flowering (that is the fusion between gun and hand) and the response it engenders (the torture of Renn's face fixed on something happening): it demands the viewer attend to the chronology of images; to, as Fried writes, "become the beholder" of an event that "has been waiting for him" (Fried, 1967: 140).

However, within this sequence two extraordinary, but interrelated details arise. The first is the uncertainty of point of view. A close up of Renn's face shows him watching the transformation of hand and gun taking place, his eyes set on discovering what happens next. The effect itself though is not viewed as a point of view from Renn's perspective; rather, it occurs as a demonstration of how a special make-up effect moves: a laboratory of synthetic flesh, wire and metal. As such the close-ups of Renn do not command empathy: the viewer simply watches as Renn watches. The prosthetic effect, meanwhile, as Cronenberg notes, is hardly slick, but it is palpable. There is then a tension between the limitations of the special effect and what it embodies; the viewer's reaction to a cosmetic ontology consequently fluctuating between awareness of a trick that exposes itself and the horror it signifies. This destabilisation of the image can be emblematic of the horror film at its most sophisticated. An illustration of this can be found in Patricia MacCormack's (2002) discussion of the face of Barbara Steele in Mario Bava's *La maschera del demonio* (1960). In her article, the author becomes aware of the fluctuating propensity of the image in one of the most haunting faces in the Italian horror genre:

> In black and white the camera exploits her cheekbones, deep eye sockets and protruding lower lip hanging from a seemingly always parted mouth. This effect suggests an incomplete face, disappearing into the background and bulging out of the screen at once, belonging neither to the positive proprioceptive realm nor negative empty space. Punctured with holes in *La maschera* Steele's face recedes within the surface rather than at the edges, like something nasty floating up out of water or a closet monster from the dark but nonetheless starkly beautiful. (MacCormack, 2002)

As with the face of Barbara Steele, the sequence from *Videodrome* withdraws as much as it performs, belying the expected role of the special effect as a performative and theatrical subject in cinema. How far one may regard this as unusual can be revealed in comparing the analogue effect here to Elsaesser and Buckland's reading

of the digital effects in Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* (1993) and *The Lost World* (1997), which observes that digital techniques can not only create believable structures with which analogue elements are able to interact, but can also emulate such effects as point-of-view, camera movement and motion blur to "strengthen[...] the illusion that the humans and dinosaurs occupy the same diegesis" (Elsaesser and Buckland, 2002: 215): "With the aid of digital technology, film-makers can fabricate a believable photo-realistic effect without being limited to the physical imprints left by profilmic events" (218).

FACES

Evaluating differences between the digital and analogue effect in cinema can be further analysed through a theory of what Gilles Deleuze refers to as the affection-image; in particular with regard to the distinction between "faceification" and "faceicity" in a discussion of the close-up. He finds the origins of these "two poles" in painting:

> Sometimes painting grasps the face as an outline, by an encircling line which traces the nose, the mouth, the edge of the eyelids, and even the beard and cap: it is a surface of faceification. Sometimes, however, it works through dispersed features taken globally; fragmentary and broken lines which indicate here the quivering of the lips, there the brilliance of a look, and which involve a content which to a greater or lesser extent rebels against the outline: these are the traits of faceicity. (Deleuze, 2005 [1986]: 90)

Importantly, Deleuze does not assert these terms as exclusive to a visual description of the facial close-up: there is such a thing as "a faceified object" (99); so that the 'naturalisation' of the dinosaurs in Spielberg's films creates an image of faceicity, of "desire" in which the perceived realism of the effect relies upon the viewer reading the subtle changes in the constellation of minute features in the digital image as plausible counterparts to the analogue image. (A better example of faceicity can be found in the form of the "amorphous and lovely" "aqueous tentacle" from *The Abyss* that mimics the facial structure of one of the characters but has no counterpart in the analogue world (see Cubitt, 2005: 253-258).) *Videodrome*'s fusion of gun and hand, however, expresses the "unity" of faceification, unable to express complexity of movement via its limited, plastic surface (Deleuze, 2005 [1986]: 90). This effect is

doubled by close-up shots of Renn, which individually communicate only one immutable emotion: pain in shot two (Figure 6); and wonder in shot four (Figure 8). The word 'wonder', indeed, is picked out from the English by Deleuze as he finds no equivalent in French. Deleuze, then, uses wonder to describe what faceification communicates, not only "admiration or astonishment", but an ability to "think [...] about something" (91).

Examine this closer: it is possible to align Deleuze's description of faceification with Barthes' sudden discovery of the *punctum* in the frontal pose of the photographic subject. The transforming hand in *Videodrome* may be admirable or astonishing, but as with Renn's response (pain/curiosity), this strangeness also sets the viewer's attitude to a condition of uncertainty; of wonder *about* as much as wonder *at* the image. More acutely, it is a response to the chronology of images. *Qua* Deleuze, this is itself a transformation of the single unchanged image into a succession of unchanged images, from faceification to faceicity: "Here the intensive series discloses its function, which is to pass on one quality to another, to emerge on to a new quality." Deleuze uses the cinema of Eisenstein to illustrate this point: "from the priest-man of God to the priest-exploiter of peasants; from the anger of the sailors to the revolutionary explosion; from the stone to the scream, as in the three postures of the marble lions ('and the stones have roared')" (92). Barthes, in discussing the *punctum* as an unreadable quality to the gaze prefigures the ability of the montage sequence to significantly alienate the viewer's confidence in the *mise-en-scene*, as it occurs on the level of faceicity in *Videodrome*.

Examined even closer, *Videodrome*'s faceification of shot to faceicity of sequence is not as precise as the images from Eisenstein conjured by Deleuze. The new quality arrived at in the end of the sequence (a final synthesis of gun and hand) is problematised by the special effects themselves.[17] Cronenberg talks of the basic 'puppetry' of the sequence, but the orchestration of moving parts by an unseen technician accounts for only two shots (Figures 7 and 9) that constitute the changes taking place. On either side of these 'movements' are the hand and gun as they 'are' (Figure 5) and the hand and gun integrated through an assemblage of supplementary 'gear' (Figure 10). Yet even the two shots that option a mechanical solution to convey change are different from each other: while in both images the three fingers

separated from the index and thumb by the trigger and butt of the gun are less mobile than those in which Woods' own hand is used – the replica's being thicker and clearly 'understood' as one sculptural unit rather than as three separate appendages – the channels between the fingers are less pronounced in the first image (Figure 5) while the second features a peculiar spike at the apex of the little finger that predicts the piercing metal shoot that emerges from it (Figure 9). This suite of images is linked by a certain resemblance, but mostly by the accident of continuity. Renn's immobility of expression too is a rapid evolution: the beginning and end of the sequence has Woods twitching and baring his teeth, while his intermediate reaction begins in stillness, before trembling, whilst retaining the same curiosity he exemplifies at the beginning of the shot. This is not 'simply' a matter of faceification versus faceicity, or the transport between the two; Deleuze's phenomenological approach to the affection-image indicates flux at the level of experience, but cannot account for the sculptural inconsistencies in the sequence from *Videodrome* and the discovery in cinema of what Barthes could only find in the photograph: that which the observer adds to the image, but is nonetheless already there.

LIMITS

The simultaneous reaching forward and drawing back of the special effect in *Videodrome* is achieved through being perceived not as one continuous image, the development of an imperfect sculpture, but of a continuity comprised of separate sculptural forms (to include Renn's face): the stone lions from *Battleship Potemkin* are understood to occupy several different geographical locations, but their combination allows them to exist in the same diegesis to convey meaning (revolution); *Videodrome*'s montage of face(s) and hand(s) occupy the same location (the peeling stone wall at the back of the *mise-en-scene* is the same in each shot) but its meaning (change) is undone by the plurality of faces and hands chosen to represent a singularity. When Cronenberg says of the effect, "there is a certain palpable quality to it: it's sculptural, it's physical, you could feel it; it was really there; it has weight", it is necessary to correct him: they are sculptural, they are physical, you could feel them; they were really there; they have weight. It is in the

viewer's search for continuity and meaning in a sequence that connotation shrinks as the images do not align with the sense.

Barthes writes of connotation that it "is a correlation immanent in the text, in the texts; or again, one may say that it is an association made by the text-as-subject within its own system." This is not to be confused with "association of ideas", which is "the system of a subject" (Barthes, 1974: 8). *Videodrome*'s connotative system works only insofar as it is legible within a basic grammar of film ("what we see behind an image", in the words of Deleuze (in Akervall: 2008)); but on the plane of practical experience any internal logic breaks. There is, then, a visceral effect at work, one that cannot be comprehended via the employment of pragmatic methods.

Comparing the shots from *Videodrome* to those from *Love Streams* that began this chapter demonstrates precisely why a difference in approach applies: Cassavetes' collision of car and victim has a precise connotation (the daydreamer's wish to be rid of a husband who no longer wants her) and a cause and effect that follows a single path. The sequence is no less an example of analogue cinema than Cronenberg's, but offers the seamlessness of a digital composition in its adherence to the logic of continuity editing.

In Fried's terminology, *Love Streams*' special effect is theatrical while *Videodrome*'s is antitheatrical. Where Fried's reading of Barthes finds this antitheatricality partly in the *punctum* of the frontal portrait, which can be compared to the special effect's indifference to legibility and continuity across its duration, he also discovers (and is slightly perplexed by) it in Barthes' statement on best appreciating the punctum when one closes one's eyes. In other words the *punctum* is permitted to emerge in absentia, burning with intensity when one revisits the image. This is not possible with cinema: the image is gone before it can generate enough heat to burn the viewer. However, the moment of the visceral wound in cinema can return, or can itself be a return of a particular motif within the diegesis; so that the disruption of details within several shots of a special effects sequence are prefigured by a photomontage of Hitler's head on a ballerina's torso featured in the *mise-en-scene* of Renn's apartment: another montage defined by inappropriate and incongruous juxtapositions.

Videodrome's montage of incompleteness permeates the entire film: all the effects are in some way at the verge of breaking point, each in some way discharging a visceral figuration outside the orbit of depiction. When Barthes speaks of "figuration" in the context of film, he refers to its capacity to "leap [...] out of the frame". For Barthes, the opposite of figuration is "representation", which is "a space of alibis (reality, morality, likelihood, readability, truth, etc.)" that "never leaves the frame". This is, undoubtedly, a useful distinction that may tell us much about the place of the image as a means by which legibility is safely perpetuated. While the visceral effect has already been established as a drawing in rather than a leaping out of the cinematic frame, Barthes' thoughts on figuration are interesting in that they express a desire of film to let go of its logical, metonymic framework: the film is "worth making" precisely because it can escape narrative, and "represent [...] nothing" (Barthes, 1975: 55-57; also Branigan, 2006: 133). A similar admission leaks through his "Research notes on some Eisenstein stills": unable to recall the precise roles played by certain characters at the beginning of *Ivan the Terrible*, Barthes concludes "it matters little if I am unable to remember the details of the story exactly" (Barthes, 1977: 53).

In *Videodrome* the visceral effect succeeds in abandoning metonymic progression, becoming closer to Barthes' "obtuse meaning" in that it is a "disruptive force" without even "the slightest symbolic (intellectual) value" (58). Yet this is not all: while figuration itself can have meaning (Barthes mentions the "gestural figuration of grief" as the "full signification" of a "tearful old woman" in *Ivan the Terrible* (56-57)) and it has the propensity to reach out to the viewer (rather than persist but remain indifferent) its "diagrammatic" capacity, of "a body [...] split into fetish objects, into erotic sites" (Barthes, 1975: 57; and Branigan, 2006: 133) invokes a tactile quality through which the visceral, like the *punctum* before it, can wound the observer. Hence the visceral is a factor of figuration, the figure, the presence, and not of representation.

Barthes writes:

> Figuration is the way in which the erotic body appears (to whatever degree and in whatever form that may be) in the profile of the text. For example: the author may appear in his text (Genet, Proust), but not in the guise of direct biography (which would exceed the body, give a

meaning to life, forge a destiny). Or again: one can feel desire for a
character in a novel (in fleeting impulses). Or finally: the text itself, a
diagrammatic and not an imitative structure, can reveal itself in the form
of a body, split into fetish objects, into erotic sites. All these
movements attest to a *figure* of the text, necessary to the bliss of
reading. (Barthes, 1975:55)

There is thus an immediacy to figuration, that need not only exist as a physical
proximity to the art object: a sculpture, a statue. Literature too, Barthes tells us, can
touch us, can have a presence as of another person. To repeat Fried, the
beholder/reader/spectator becomes uneasy as *he* becomes the subject at once
'crowded' by the 'impassive object': the work of art, the novel, the film; which is, in
fact, a "surrogate person", which has the same kind of presence as a real person.
Barthes' use of language sets up oppositions, with *biography*, *meaning*, *destiny* on
the one hand, and *erotic body*, *desire*, *bliss* on the other. To be sure, the 'way' of
figuration is described in visceral terms.

However, Barthes continues: "even more than the text, the film will *always* be
figurative (which is why films are still worth making) – even if it represents nothing"
(Barthes, 1975: 55). Evidently, Barthes is sanctioning a *literalist* reading of film, one
in which *representation* does not apply. However, representation, as already noted,
is a deep concern for film theorists, as in Lowenstein's allegorical reading of the
horror film. Indeed an argument for film theory can be construed as an argument *for*
representation, for film not merely as an instrument that records reality, but as
capable of being interpreted as art. But is this really what Barthes is saying? Perhaps
his words on representation will offer some wider context within which to consider
film.

Representation, on the other hand, is *embarrassed figuration*,
encumbered with other meanings than that of desire: a space of alibis
(reality, morality, likelihood, readability, truth, etc.) [...] Of course, it
very often happens that representation takes desire itself as an object of
imitation; but then, such desire never leaves the frame, the picture; it
circulates among the characters; if it has a recipient, that recipient
remains interior to the fiction [...] That is what representation is: when
nothing emerges, when nothing leaps out of the frame: of the picture,
the book, the screen[.] (56-57.)

Barthes here *includes* the screen as a possible arena for representation.
Representation, then, is not entirely separate from figuration; rather it is figuration

from which *desire* has been extracted, or sanitised through a process of reasoning, the "negative identity" of the alibi: "I am not where you think I am; I am where you think I am not" (Barthes, 2000: 123). The integral argument here is for an erotics with none of the sterility of Lyotard's simulacrum, but is *diagrammatic*, urgent, and in possession of a presence as of another body.

The visceral is close to Barthes' idea of the writerly, as opposed to the readerly text, that demarcating the text so that it is engaged in an active rather than a passive correspondence with its audience. Engaged is the perfect term here, as it is the mission of the writerly to eliminate the "idleness" of consumption, to free the reader from his role as an "intransitive" and "serious" "customer". Without this engagement, the reader accepts only the "ideological value of a text", that is, "a value of representation, not of production"; the text, in other words has no weight for the reader:

> instead of functioning himself, instead of gaining access to the magic of
> the signifier, to the pleasure of writing, he is left with no more than the
> poor freedom either to accept or reject the text: reading is nothing more
> than a referendum. Opposite the writerly text, then,   is its
> countervalue, its negative, reactive value: what can be read, but not
> written: the readerly. (Barthes, 1975: 4)

The visceral is writerly through opposition to an acceptance of meaning at the level of the outer surface of the film: its quiet, dormant energies attract and are recognised as significant, just as they offer no solution to its significance. It is a paradox, for while it most certainly exists, the visceral escapes full explanation, full disclosure full meaning; qua Barthes: "There may be nothing to say about writerly texts", there may be nothing to say about the visceral (ibid.); after all, like the writerly text, it "is not a thing" (5) and where it can be found, it is only be found "by accident, fleetingly, obliquely in certain limit-works" (4-5).

The limit-works Barthes thinks of exist primarily in literature and not in film. But as suggested by Elsaesser and Buckland cinema can discover aspects of the writerly (2002: 146-160). There can exist, as a consequence, such a thing as the cinematic limit-work. Barthes agrees: "The best films (to me) are those which best withhold meaning", which get "rid of all parasite meanings". While this "is extremely difficult", Barthes posits Bunuel's *The Exterminating Angel* as "a film which

disturbs profoundly, and which forces you to go beyond dogmatism, beyond doctrines": it has "significance"; it is not at all "absurd" (Barthes, 1963: 21).

The absurd/significance dichotomy here corresponds with criticisms of the visceral that manifest its capacity to disturb. Cronenberg voices this as an apologia for the hand-gun fusion effect in *Videodrome* being not as slick as CGI, grasping for reasons why it is nonetheless effective. The words chosen – sculptural, physical – are synonyms for the visceral, but are inadequate in revealing what truly makes the sequence disturbing; it is after all, 'not a thing', and Cronenberg himself describes it best in his belief, in wanting to 'show the unshowable': it is the unshowable remaining unshowable even after it has been shown. Barthes writes: "The more plural the text, the less it is written before I read it" (Barthes, 1974: 10). The visceral is lost to language.

LOVE STREAMS

This grasping for the right language to comprehend the visceral can be found in pejorative statements about the visceral work:

> He [...] prolongs shots to the point of embarrassment (and beyond). He does it deliberately, all right, but to what purpose? Acute discomfort sets in, and though some in audience will once again accept what is going on as raw, anguishing truth, most people will - rightly, I think - take their embarrassment as evidence of Cassavetes' self-righteous ineptitude (Kael, 1974).

Kael is reviewing Cassavetes' *A Woman under the Influence*. Kael's 'embarrassment' is set against 'raw, anguishing truth'; a telling example of the critic still effectively trying to come to terms with that which is hidden, before dismissing it as 'self-righteous ineptitude'.

Cassavetes' cinema is different to Cronenberg's in that the visceral element cannot be quantified to specific moments in the diegesis. The unshowability of meaning behind, for instance, the transformation of the human body can be picked up as a solid motif that, although it persists in being elusive, has a specific locale. In this sense *Videodrome* is readerly, "a classic text" (Barthes, 1974: 4) but from that erupts special effects that contain a visceral element that cannot be measured by degrees of gore. Cassavetes' films, including *Love Streams*, considered here, are writerly in the

sense that *The Exterminating Angel* can be deemed writerly: possible to "evaluate" on a "primary" level, but only at the level of "production", not of "representation" (4).

At a basic level representation does not play a part in *Love Streams* as it is "not simply about itself but very much about the body of work" (Kouvaros, 2004: 160): it is a "compendium of Cassavetes' career and films" (158):

> The film recalls the milieu of nightclubs and bars found in *Husbands* and *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie*. In his black tuxedo, Robert Harmon reminds us of the three friends out on the town in *Husbands* and Cosmo in *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie* on his way to the Ship Ahoy, where he will gamble his way back into debt and lose control of his nightclub. Even Robert's house in *Love Streams* – the house where Cassavetes lived with his family – is the same house used in *Faces* and *Minnie and Moskowitz*. *Love Streams* also seems to revisit the central relationship in *Minnie and Moskowitz*. Gena Rowlands and Seymour Cassel, who perform the roles of Minnie Moore and Seymour Moskowitz, return, but this time they are reconfigured as Jack and Sarah Lawson. (159-160)

Yet these reconfigurations are themselves emblematic of the way the earlier films pay "attention [...] to individual expressions and flickering of emotion" without aiming at "a search for truth or an effort to unlock the workings of an inner world" (45). In the words of Pierre and Comolli (1968), "it makes us aware of one of the weaknesses of cinema: its right and proper inability to explain the inner world, since all it can literally grasp are external signs, as being not unrelated to inner turmoil" (Pierre and Comolli, 1968: 324; also Kouvaros, 2004: 45).

The car that crushes Jack Lawson becomes an interesting counterpoint to the impenetrability of the majority of text; a moment, in comparison with the film that surrounds it, which offers clear psychological motivation and meaning. Contrasting this is another scene; it too focused on the movement of a car, but whose meaning is buried, displaced by the visceral.

The sequence is preceded by the arrival at Robert Harmon's house of Albie, the pre-teen son from a previous relationship whom Robert has never met. In entering, Albie meets the household of young women that Robert has 'collected', and bolts outside, running down the sloped, narrow driveway and into the street. Robert races into his car and pursues him. The purpose of the pursuit is to bring the boy home, but the

unusual framing of this four shot, one minute sequence that describes Albie's escape and capture offer an ambiguity of purpose reminiscent in effect, if not style, of the final moments of Ethan Edwards' quest to find Debbie, his niece who has been captured by an Indian chief in *The Searchers*: embedded into an alien culture, Debbie has become contaminated by the Indian, so in the pause before resolution is underlined, there is doubt:

> John Wayne lifts and holds her at arm's length. I hold my breath. No matter how often I've seen *The Searchers* before, I do not know, at this very moment and for a split second, whether he will kill her or fuck her. The odds are even. Then he sweeps her into his arms and says, 'Let's go home Debbie.' (Stern, 1996: 34.)

'No matter how often I've seen... I do not know...' When Barthes conceives of a visceral sign in *Mythologies*, he sees it as "indicative of a moment in time" (Barthes, 1957: 28). In *The Searchers* this moment in time is a split second, but contained in that split second is a visceral intensity that sweeps away knowledge and certainty. When Robert Harmon catches Albie, stopping the car on a suburban avenue and ending the chase on foot there is also a split second in which anything is possible – any violence, any connection – and viewed in an extreme long shot, that split second is irrecoverable. What appears to happen is Harmon dragging the boy by the hair, before certainty resumes and the two walk nearer, Harmon securing Albie by the arm and throwing him into the passenger seat of the car. The ambiguity of this split second is heightened by the viewer's knowledge of the relationship between father and son: by the time Albie returns to his mother, Harmon has given him alcohol and left him alone in a hotel room in Las Vegas. Once returned to his mother, Albie does not reappear, nor is he spoken of again. The visceral moment exists as a vortex whose centripetal force absorbs the knowledge of all that has come before, and will come after.

Chasing Albie down the drive, Harmon's car is itself pursued, by a mobile camera that glides with the same rhythm as the vehicle, just as it seems to keep its subject at the centre of the frame. It is a moment of exhilaration, of hurtling recklessly through the diegesis as if looking through the eyes of an effortlessly mobile prowler who nonetheless does not exist as a character. Returning to the subject in relation to Barthes' *punctum* the subject here becomes the viewer himself, aware of his position

in a vehicle following a vehicle driven by a man whose purpose is uncertain. The visceral once again is aligned with the spectacle, the viewer spliced into the diegesis by the perceived realism of camera technique: a realism that is felt because it fulfils a "'powerful urge for a sense of contact with the real', as it 'inscribes' [...] physiological contact on the recorded text" (West, 2005: 85; also Fetveit, 2002: 130). It is this physical contact one may argue is the crux of Cassavetes' cinema: not interplay between characters, but the collision of kinetic objects: an "impression that the camera operator is chasing after the actors' bodies in order to keep them in frame. So we have a sense here of a cinema built on the physical frame and bodily energy" (Mouellic, 2002, in Kouvaros, 2004: 36). The foregrounding of the speeding car as spectacle effectively binds the viewer to an object that has become appendage to and metaphor for the human body in modernity:

> The automobile is the thing owned which defines the modern persona, a
> mechanical extension of the self and the body, a persona invested with
> magical properties, a technological form of the will-to-power. The car
> as the expressive face of the peripatetic self, the instrument of its
> wandering, fits well with the movie camera. (Orr, 1993: 129-130)

One could argue *Love Streams* fetishises the automobile in this sequence: in each of the four shots the car is central, dictating the pace of movement, the camera towing behind, or fruitlessly attempting to shake it in all but one of those shots; the camera can rest only in the first shot – in which Harmon jogs to and steps into the car – and in the last as the car ploughs to a halt. These four shots offer a schematic of the car: one view from the side, one from the front and two from the rear: the last of these (and the last shot of the sequence) also allowing a brief isometric view of the automobile in stasis. But by being framed in the same diegesis in which the (wished-for, oneiric) death of Seymour, crushed by a car occurs, also suggests the crisis of the car as killing machine, "the car as both a site of technological perfection and a site of inevitable decay" (Newland, 2009: 17).

The framing of the automobile suggests another dimension when one compares the 1984 composition of Harmon's convertible against the surrounding *mise-en-scene* (Figure 11) with an image from the 2008 video game *Grand Theft Auto IV* (Figure 12).

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Figure 11: Pursued. *Love Streams* **(John Cassavetes, 1984 [©Cannon Films]) Screen capture**

Figure 12: Pursued. *Grand Theft Auto IV* **(2008 [©Rockstar Games]) Screen capture**

One can argue for the prescience of Cassavetes' film here; but what is truly remarkable about both media is the way the observer's position in relation to the *mise-en-scene* is problematised. Poole, writing on video games, describes the player's avatar[18] – a character controlled in third-perspective – such as the car in Figure 12, as part of "a perspectival construction in which the player can see the character under control, and [where] the representational viewpoint is a completely disembodied one" (Poole, 2000: 133). Disembodied, but not uninvolved; Martti Lahti, for example, notes how "games regularly used a variety of techniques to register the visceral element of playing, that is, to imagine bodily sensations or consequences for the player". Lahti is referring directly to the genre of games known as first-person shooters, "marked by the visual absence of a player's avatar" (Lahti, 2003: 161). What would be a false conclusion to draw from the differences in first- and third-person views of a virtual, interactive world is that the former enables greater immersion than the latter; viewpoint has less influence on the player's

involvement with the game world than how "spatial and encyclopaedic" that game world is; for these are the factors that "help to make digital creations seem as explorable and extensive as the actual world" (Murray, 1997: 71). However, the third person perspective in games raises tantalising questions on the phenomenological relationship between the moving image and the onlooker.

The exhilaration of following the car in *Love Streams* is coupled with the uncertainty of the viewer's questions of his own role in the drama. Bonitzer explains the effect of this dual role that is demanded of the viewer:

> There is therefore a misinterpretation here which fails to understand that it is not at the place of the subject that the camera operates, but at the place of the Other [...] We cannot identify with someone whose face is always hidden from us. And if we cannot identify ourselves, we cannot share the anxieties of the character. In a thriller this can become rather annoying. (Bonitzer, 1981: 58)

I include the line, 'In a thriller this can be quite annoying' as this indicates something of the visceral effect that occurs in the sequence from *Love Streams*. Bonitzer is of course discussing a different film (Robert Montgomery's *Lady in the Lake* (1947)), but the problems of a perceived but invisible subject, a cinematic tic that permeates not just this scene, but Cassavetes' entire oeuvre signifies a coexistence of the spectacular and the visceral – that which reaches out to the viewer and that which pulls away – as one reason why critics like Kael label the experience of watching these films as "almost a form of self-flagellation" (Kael, 1970). The incommensurate suturing of self and image enables a writerly response to the text: one not of absorption but of engagement simultaneous to dissatisfaction: it is active the way the video game is active. The literal and partial fusion of flesh and technology in *Videodrome* and the conceptual integration and separation of self and Other in *Love Streams* denies, somewhat, the subjectivisation of the viewer, and his placement in a recognisable ideological framework. Denial, even partial denial of the viewer's 'right' to subjectivity causes hostility, as identification with the events and people onscreen "structures meaning, crystallizes ideological positions, and works to provide a sense and coherence to culture" (Marshall, 1997: ix-x; also Austin and Baker, 2003: 13). Suture, in turn, "persuad[es] the viewer to accept certain cinematic images as an accurate reflection of his or her subjectivity [...] it does this *transparently* (i.e. it conceals the apparatuses of enunciation)" (Silverman, 1983:

157). In this way the ability to infiltrate and subvert the transparency of ideological constructs becomes one way of defining the visceral.

FROM FILM TO VIDEO GAMES

At this point it is worth looking closer at the connection between film and the video game in reference to the visceral. In Cassavetes and Cronenberg's cinema, as I have argued earlier, the perceived spectacle of the shot is undone by the peculiarities of composition. Either in the inconsistency of little details *mise-en-scene* itself or the placement of the camera that destabilises the viewer's sense of identification with the event, the visceral bleeds the sense of excitement from the sequence. The visceral operates neither in the realm of narrative (as discussed in the previous chapter) nor in the world of attraction and spectacle.

Video games are useful here as they currently operate in the crossover between spectacle and narrative that Wolf (2011) sees as a natural progression from necessary primitivism as the medium 'finds its feet' to maturity into a means through which complex narratives might be told. As video games ascend towards this plateau of narrative complexity, Arsenault (2009) asks,

> How do game mechanics contribute to the unfolding of the game's story? Do they tell something different from the scripted (non-interactive) cut-scenes or dialogues? What of the various distinctions between [...] story and discourse, or story, plot and narrative? How do narrative elements influence the player's understanding of the game? Are video game narratives closer to literature, drama, film or role-playing games, and which of their unique affordances do they share? What can we learn from comparing and contrasting them to these other forms of storytelling? (369-370)

Equating video games with other media is folded into the concept of interactivity, which is unique to the medium, and aesthetics, whereby "the commercial video game industry has been fundamentally oriented towards the steady 'progression' of technology platforms. Along the way, representational aesthetics have largely followed these technical advances" (Camper, 2009: 169) moving from the semi-abstract, two-dimensional forms of *Pac-Man* (1978) to the fully three-dimensional, much more 'realistic' shooters such as *Modern Warfare 2* (2009).[19]

What these two avenues of research – narratology and aesthetics – tend to ignore is precisely what I mean by the visceral. This being, as (certainly mainstream) video games grope towards a perceived attempt towards verisimilitude and fidelity in line with Hollywood's application of digital effects, the ways in which games create unexpected results for the user/player. These are results not anticipated by the programmers, designers or writers of the game, and experienced uniquely by each player, and may not be repeated. In other words, they are visceral results very much in keeping with Barthes' description of the visceral sign as something "invented, so to speak, on each occasion" (2000 [1957]: 28). In video game studies this tendency for games to misbehave in certain ways is unwelcome: "Bad designs can lead to an unpleasant gameplay experience" (Picard, 2009: 334), both breaking the intended usability of the game and interrupting the narrative sense and immersiveness of the experience.

As hinted at earlier, however, this capacity for games to be broken, either despite or because of player interaction, accesses what Barthes refers to as the writerly. Thus, through a certain 'illegal' form of interaction, the player becomes a "producer" of the text (Barthes, 1970: 4).[20] Interestingly, this disruption of the sense of narrative cohesion and the theatricality of spectacle becomes possible as the quest for graphical fidelity is closer to being realised. Games in which the player has a greater control over the way an environment is viewed (as in the first person shooter, which emulates the pans, tracks and tilts of the human eye as interpreted by the film camera) allow the player to angle his view of the virtual world so that ostensibly solid objects are shown to be hollow in the manner that Minimalist objects are understood to be hollow. *Left 4 Dead 2* (2009) for example, affords the opportunity for the player, downed by a horde of infected humans, to gaze up at the attackers who are rapidly killing him with punches and kicks. What the player sees, however, is an abstract amalgam of external body parts, angry mouths and eyes; a view, that is, into the emptiness of these ostensibly human forms. In this way, this view of the environment recalls such early experiments in the formal properties of the digital image, of hollowness and solidity as found in the *non*-interactive computer generated art of Rebecca Allen. Her video for Kraftwerk's *Musique Non Stop* (1986), in particular, has kinetic wireframe heads that, once stripped of their virtual skins, are revealed to have no insides.[21] These are all images that demonstrate what the visceral

does: it disrupts both the sense of narrative and the thrill of the spectacle by underscoring the manufactured properties of the image.[22]

One game that resists both narrative and spectacle, in spite of itself, is the independently produced adventure game, *The Path* (2009). Designed by a small team, Tale of Tales, it is chosen as an example of the visceral in action within a video game setting as it has thematic links with certain topics mentioned elsewhere in this thesis. Hence, it is based on a well-established story, that of Little Red Riding Hood. The significance of this tale has certain echoes in *Hard Candy* (David Slade, 2005) mentioned in my introduction as an example of the visceral affect (that is, the affect of visceral images that provoke a response of shock in the viewer) associated with the horror genre. It also has a strong narrative base, which is tied up with the aesthetic of the red coat of the young girl.[23] However, despite this, as will be argued in the next section, the game manages to escape these 'literal' and 'metaphorical' meanings that burden the player and successfully enter the realm of Barthes' 'hidden' and 'writerly' modes of engagement as the game is 'broken.' It becomes, in other words, a text that contains a component that is visceral, unable to be satisfactorily explained by the language of narrative or spectacle. In this way *The Path* offers another way of understanding the visceral as it occurs in Cassavetes and Cronenberg's films.

THE PATH

> Computer games are particularly visceral media experiences. This would seem counter-intuitive, as the player is most commonly safely situated in front of a terminal, far away from any real violence. However, the graphics and sounds of contemporary games effectively make a seemingly detached and visual experience quite tangible. Physicality is established through many devices including point-of-view visual perspective, sounds (breathing, footsteps, punching, growls, explosions, etc.) and 'camera movements' that attempt to mirror bodily motion through gravity-bound space. Such properties overtly invoke cinematic processes and experiences. (Poster, 2007: 325)

The discussion of video games in the light of cinema raises important questions about relationships between analogue and digital aspects of multi-media. Agreeing with Poster's avowal that video games are visceral experiences – and having hitherto defined the relationship between the visceral and the world as anything other than smooth – appears to contradict the role of the digital image as one capable of "a

certain seamlessness, a generic expectation of something new, a willingness to sever connections with fundamental laws of nature" (Cubitt, 2004: 245-6). One way of attempting to argue for the digital-as-visceral is to follow Cubitt's point: "It is not necessarily the essential nature of digital media to provide these things, but they often are provided and become part of the cycle of expectation and satisfaction on which the closed loop of commodity production proceeds" (246). Thus, seamlessness, novelty and the alien are not necessary prerequisites for the digital image: but for digital technology to attempt to emulate the analogue imperfections of, say, the *Videodrome* hand-gun fusion effect would be disingenuous: the mere substitution of one set of generic codes for another. The "accidence" of the analogue world would still not figure (Paul Virilio, in Cubitt, 2004: 251).[24]

It is therefore worth remembering that the development of digital effects in cinema and the video game are progressing in different directions. In cinema, the seamlessness of the special effect through CGI is not a matter of creating a verisimilitude of everyday reality:

> Absolute simulation is simply not desirable or economically supportable as long as we live in an anthropocentric world which favours the human as the ultimate example of the real, and the greatest challenge for simulation. What is being moved towards is not a replacement of the human by its simulacrum but a convergence, an interdependence between the human and the machine, the digital and the analogue, the real and the simulated. (North, 2008: 182-183)

The visceral becomes impossible in the cinematic digital effect because convergence has already been achieved: films by Roland Emmerich, such as *Independence Day* and *Godzilla* have successfully "end[ed] the period in which [...] the difference between elements was the source of the magic" (Michele Pierson, according to Cubitt, 2008: 258).

In video game development, by contrast, there is a significant move away from abstraction to simulation:

> Game graphics were, and to a large extent still are, the main criteria by which advancing game technology is benchmarked by the buying public; thus representational graphics act as a means of visually benchmarking the computer's graphics against the visual experience of unmediated reality, while abstract graphics are unable to serve such a purpose. (Wolf, 2003: 53)

Absolute simulation is still a long way from being realised in the video game. There is a proliferation of technical restrictions, not only at the level of design, but also level of hardware, and the processing abilities of gaming platforms available to the consumer (Pixar's slogan, "Reality begins at 80 million polygons" hints at the problems inherent in creating even a non-interactive virtual environment (Cubitt, 2004: 396)); what this means is that in exploring ways into photo-realism the aesthetics of the video game can exhibit exactly those fissures that are symptomatic of the analogue image. An example of how these fissures are instilled with visceral properties in digital media can be explored via *The Path*, "a short horror game inspired by older versions of Little Red Riding Hood, set in modern day" (Tale of Tales, 2009).

The game's faith in the immersive properties of the folk tale becomes immediately apparent in the opening graphic: a tableau vivant of the six characters the player will guide around the world (Figure 13); girls from the age of nine to nineteen (according to the Tale of Tales website, 2009) who connote a sisterly bond by their proximity and the richness of red and black in their clothes, even as they are each determined to express individual styles. In this opening 'menu', each of the girls is repetitively doing something (reading, stroking a docile rabbit), but the atmosphere of the *mise-en-scene* is of ennui, not engagement with a task. As the player moves the mouse cursor – shaped as a wicker basket – around the room, hovering it over any of the girls will trigger that girl's interest: she will look up, an action simultaneously accompanied by a close-up of her face, superimposed but transparent, covering a large portion of the screen. The face is a blank as in Deleuze's faceification: it is not an expression that can be read. Clicking the mouse button over the image of the girl will cause her to shift her body as if ready to leave, still looking 'out' at the player. The screen fades to black and the game begins.

Figure 13: The selection screen in *The Path* (©Tale of Tales, 2009) Screen capture

Developer Tale of Tales writes of *The Path*'s importance as a narrative experience, one whose meanings are glimpsed through the interactions chosen by the player. Instructions, indeed, are minimal: after the initial decision is made (that is, of which girl to 'play') the black screen fades in to a travelling shot, following a concrete road viewed from above. Trees line each side of the road, which abruptly stops, becoming a dirt track: the path. At this border between the urban and rural stands the girl, and as the view settles behind the character, the game's only instructions appear on the screen and flower into organic shapes: 'Go to Grandmother's House and Stay on the Path.' Following these instructions creates an uneventful experience: the path is straight and leads directly to Grandmother's picket fence, and behind that, the cottage. The player is told he has failed and both he and the character he had chosen is returned to the menu. Implicitly, one is encouraged to disbelieve the instructions and 'stray from the path,' exploring the expansive forest on either side. In order to 'win' the game, it transpires, one must lead each girl through the trees in order to find the wolf, which is a manifestation of fear and desire.

There is clearly much in this scenario that has potential to unnerve the player; particularly in its explicit reference to a folkloric tradition that has undergone rigorous "psychoanalytical interpretation": the "redness" of the hood "reflecting a construction of the female body as blood-filled container leaking at regular intervals"(Pettitt, 2009: 114) and the inclusion of the wolf – a predatory male – from whose violent relationship with the girl is built a "story of gendered violence, of

sexual violation with a specific history in which certain elements have been emphasized to fit particular conceptualizations of gender and sexuality" (Marshall, 2004: 266). These are visceral constructs, it appears. Yet through psychoanalytic reading, the visceral moves from the domain of figuration to representation: a metonymic archetype whose effect, through a system of exegesis, is transplanted from the corporeal to the ideological (a discrimination of language, in other words, after Barthes: "moral, aesthetic, political, alethiological"(Barthes, 1974: 4)): "Little Red Riding Hood, like constructions of rape victims in contemporary discourses of law and media, was in unauthorised territory, the forest rather than the home, talking in a free and uninhibited way to a male who wasn't her husband or father. In popular parlance, Little Red 'asked for it'" (Marshall, 2004: 266).

The visceral effect of Little Red Riding Hood as figured in *The Path* occurs at the intersection of various levels of graphical competence and Tale of Tales' aspiration to evoke older versions of the story.

To take this second point first, as Pettitt witnesses, the story of Little Red Riding Hood goes through profound and subtle changes "as it modulates from oral tradition to printed fairy tale" (Pettitt, 2009: 104). By legitimating several versions of the same story as 'originary,' Pettitt immediately opens Little Red Riding Hood to a writerly analysis, noting, for instance, how the fates of Riding Hood and her grandmother are connoted through the articulation of specific instances of *langue* in different European vernaculars. In the Grimm brothers' version, "the wolf has respectively 'swallowed' (*verschluckte*) and 'gulped down' (*verschlang*) his victims, rather than eating and perhaps chewing them, as may be implied by the *manger* of the French versions where the girl is killed." The possibility of rescue – the hunter cutting the victims out of the wolf's belly – is therefore made 'possible' within the fabulist logic of the fairy tale in the German version. (118.) *The Path* navigates these indeterminacies through the implementation of six different but connected Red Riding Hoods, each with her own wolf; whose wicked intent is never made explicit.

Such ambiguities of narrative are achieved extensively through the characters' journey through the digital environment: as each Red Riding Hood encounters her wolf (who, it is worth pointing out, is not always male nor characteristically 'vulpine') there is certainly a suggestion that a violent *denouement* is to come, but as

player control is relinquished (and in a manoeuvre borrowed from cinema) the tableau of 'wolf' and 'victim' dwindles in size, the virtual camera pulling back, framing the two in an extreme long shot, until the wood engulfs them. The image then fades to black. The subsequent fade-in reveals Red Riding Hood prone on the path. Player input is returned, but in lifting the character to her feet, one notices how wretched she has become: she walks sluggishly, her body moving limply towards Grandmother's House. This image is undoubtedly unnerving; an effect achieved through the connotations of what could possibly have happened during the fade-out, and in the uncertainty of the answer.

Connotations, however, appear *within* the text; frightening propositions – his hand is fusing with a gun; he is going to hurt the boy; she has been violated – that are nonetheless part of the language of the text. The presence of the visceral in *The Path* – as it appears in *Videodrome* and *Love Streams* before it – occurs as a rift 'in the profile of the text'; that is as a force that enables figuration. Thus, in *The Path* it is not a thing: not the wolf, nor even the broken body of the child, but in a conglomeration of elements; it is the collision of Red Riding Hood with a tree that appears to eat/swallow her – echoing Pettitt's observation about the elusiveness of a correct, unifying translation (Figure 14); it is the wood that has no specific geography through which one can orientate oneself – once the character wanders from the path, there is no way back to it as every direction one walks eventually leads to the wolf, thereby constructing a bond between player and character, the former feeling distaste over leading the latter to her ruin, no matter how prescribed.

Then there is Red Riding Hood herself: her blankness of character instils a sense of unease: she has no history, a fact drawn out by her physical depiction, illustrated by a minimal iconography of colour and shape. Thus at the close of each girl's narrative, the twist of her body suggests, but does not explicate the nature of the violence: as with *Videodrome*'s hand-gun transformation, what is *not* explicitly written into the body is the visceral; and what is visceral cannot be readily articulated, not even through the visual language of the moving image.

Figure 14: Swallowed? Gobbled? Eaten? *The Path* **(©Tale of Tales, 2009) Screen capture**

Pettitt refers to *The Path*'s "punk aesthetic" (2009: 121); and what the game shares with *Videodrome* and *Love Streams* is punk's independence from mainstream sources of funding, and as such is infused with a similarly low-tech visual style, one that uses

> the body as a site to explore transgressive ideas of sexuality, violence
> and abjection; do-it-yourself aesthetics, collage and appropriation as
> alternative means of visual communication; and the underground scene
> as a radical social space and ground for artistic cross-fertilisation.
> (Sladen and Yedgar: 7)

Artistic cross-fertilisation in the context of *Videodrome*, *Love Streams* and *The Path* is an exploration of the medium within the limits of the medium itself: juxtaposing the mechanical and the flesh in ways that foreground the distance between the two. The video game, while it is a digital medium, exists as part of the "myth of transparency" that "Software, hardware, and server corporations" promote through the necessity to upgrade systems and software so that "'obsolete' hardware and slow modems" take on a physical presence (Marks, 2002: 180). *The Path* can be seen as part of a tradition in computer art characterised by an "intentionally low-tech aesthetic" (181).

The word 'intentionally' bothers me here, and so it should: the visceral effect is not engendered via intent, but as a by-product of certain conditions of design. *The Path* becomes useful in illustrating this, as those intentional moments of lyricism and seduction, notably those in which the girls come across a certain object pregnant with

significance (a television set that broadcasts static; the remains of a building) are themselves, as Fried would say pejoratively, merely interesting. Perhaps not even interesting, as the words that appear on the screen to express each girl's thoughts are too obtuse to convey even abstract meaning (Robin, the youngest, 'writes' when she comes across a graveyard, "People die. It's hard to imagine for a kid like me. They die and we put them in the ground. Like flowers."). The scripted spaces of *The Path* are its special effects: far too bloated and obvious to be visceral. The visceral's presence, meanwhile, grips the player even as it remains hidden somewhere in the wood's stifling metamorphosis.

DIGITAL/ANALOGUE

The Path becomes more transparent in its intent to disturb as it employs written language to create atmosphere. What occurs, then, is a transposition of terms, so that 'digital' and 'analogue' refer not to an aesthetic of the moving image, but to their definitions in the realm of semiology. And what occurs when these definitions are mapped across an aesthetic of the special and visceral effect is a reversal of meaning, so that the analogue becomes bound to the written and the digital to the image. Applied to Cassavetes and Cronenberg's cinemas, the visceral is thus read as a digital condition of the solid image that is removed from precise definitions. The visceral in *Love Streams* and *Videodrome* shares with *The Path* a facet resistant to interpretation however we attempt to interact with them. Whichever way we turn – either as players of *The Path* or as viewers attempting to concepttualise aspects of *Love Streams* or *Videodrome* – we cannot find the visceral characteristics of these media images as they do not operate as analogues of recognisable, stable and formal patterns of address.

Hence, as Barthes writes, "The image's analogical aspect is linked to its continuous aspect, a continuity that, in the case of film, involves not only a spatial component but also reinforcement by a temporal continuity, the succession of images" (Barthes, 1964: 31). Accepting this as true, the visceral emerges as neither spatial nor temporal. It is digital in the way written or spoken language is digital, founded as it is on a principle of arbitrariness. The arbitrariness of the visceral image therefore corresponds with the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign.

By contrast the digital image as fabricated special effect, seamlessly integrated with the analogue world, is understood in semiological terms as analogical, because it is continuous, and has an unproblematic connection not only with that which comes before and aftert, but also with those other objects with which it shares space in the mise-en-scene. The special effect therefore occupies the first two "levels of meaning" ("informational", "symbolic") picked up by Barthes in his reading of the Eisenstein stills (1977: 52); thus, despite Thompson equating Barthes' third meaning with narrative excess,[25] and the special effect's tendency to overload the human synapse with information, the intensity of digital compositing and CGI nonetheless makes sense on a corporeal level, as the special effect invents "a world rather than a narrative, [...] a circumscribed perfection removed from history and thence from dialectical process" (Cubitt, 2004: 243). It is communion with the observer, so that even effects which pertain to move faster than the eye, "that are more real than real, that have been injected with an excess of images, speed, and signification" (Blackmore, 2007: 371) contain both informational and symbolic meaning in relation to a profilmic world as it is unveiled to and discovered by the observer.

In this way, the special effect does not possess even connotative meaning when lined up with the visceral: the special effect is entirely denotative. Barthes writes, "denotation is not the first meaning, but pretends to be so; under this illusion, it is ultimately no more than the *last* of the connotations (the one which seems both to establish and to close the reading)" (Barthes, 1974: 9); Robin's words at the graveyard in *The Path* "appear to be telling us something simple, literal, primitive: something true", that is a "return to the nature of language, to language as nature" but is only part of a "superior myth" by which language pretends not to be literary, not to aspire to the heights of literature. In a remarkable congruence with Fried, Barthes describes denotation as "theatrical, foreordained to *represent* the collective innocence of language" (9); Robin's words: theatrical, a special effect are part of the alibi that insists on seeking out the viewer who must compare "changing views of the work with an intellectual comprehension of its basic form" (Fried, 2005: 572); the basic form here being the 'primitive truth' of childlike innocence, and translated into the virtual world of the cinematic spectacle as a "cosmic" presence, omniscient and therefore pre-existing all other meanings: the word as God (Cubitt, 2004: 251).

The visceral figuration of the image is not, on the other hand, perceived as innocent: it does not adhere to the myth of denotation, yet neither does it connote: the special effect of the hand fusing with the gun or the car racing along a suburban avenue can be dismantled, analysed and understood as concept, as faceification; but the individual parts, which do not follow a sequence, which cannot be verified metonymically, disrupt the viewer's balance, and disturb him bodily. The visceral sign contains a signifier and a signified, but they exist in constant flux, the former situated somewhere in the diegesis; but the latter unable to locate itself precisely in space or time, simultaneously incorporating and eliminating all prepositional relationships.

REACHING OUT, PULLING AWAY

Video games such as *The Path* demonstrate, then, the oppositional forces at work in the medium. There is, on one hand Fried's concept of theatricality, which demands the viewer's engagement, and then there is the visceral, which we might say – to adopt a spatial metaphor –operates in entirely the opposite direction. Rather than reaching out to the viewer, it pulls away from any attempt by the viewer to comprehend it. The metaphor, here, is appropriate. When we speak of certain aspects of the modern cinema experience as spectacle, for instance, we talk of the conjoining of viewer and event. Hence Recuber, on the possibilities afforded by new technologies writes,

> The boundaries between the metaphysical space of filmic images and
> the physical space of the theatre collapse with giant 3-D IMAX
> projection, and the lines between man and machine are blurred with
> wide, curved screens; digital surround sound; and stadium-style seating.
> The spectator becomes one with the spectacle through these
> technological interfaces; one no longer goes to the theatre and simply
> watches a movie, one is plugged into it, experiencing it as much
> viscerally as visually. (Recuber, 2007: 324)

Recuber is writing of what he terms "immersion cinema"; [26] whereby the conjoining of spectacle and spectator occurs via the metaphor of 'plugging in', and its associations with consumerism.

This, in fact offers another conceptual dimension by which we may understand what the visceral does. In fact these ideas of 'reaching towards' and 'pulling away'

attributed to theatricality and the visceral, respectively can be understood alongside Metz's concept of the syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes discussed in the previous chapter. If the visceral can be visualised as a disruption to the horizontal flow of narrative, it can also be understood as a simultaneous movement in the opposite direction to the theatricality of spectacle.

The conclusion here is that the visceral thrill extends along a theoretical z-axis, "which is perpendicular to the picture plane and traces the trajectory to and away from the viewer [and] is not physically present in a two-dimensional plane, so it differs from the x-axis [syntagmatic] and y-axis [paradigmatic] in that it can only be implied in an image" (Wolf, 2009: 151). In this model both spectacle and spectator reach out to each other. But we might also say that *adjectival* quality of the visceral (shock, disgust) also extends along this line. The visceral as noun (mentioned in the chapter, "The Visceral: from Adjective to Noun"), as (broadly speaking) a negative experience that cannot be fully explained also exists on this plane perpendicular to the viewer, but moves in an opposing direction, so that both it and the viewer are in a state of constant withdrawal from each other: the visceral, as it avoids language; and the viewer, as he attempts to avoid the horror of encountering something for which there is no language.[27]

The spatial theory behind this can be found in certain examples of non-Euclidean geometry. Wolf, for example, finds it in video games using still images, "typically navigation-based adventure games, in which the images were used for changing first-person views of different locations" (Wolf, 2009: 161). Therefore

> images which were individually consistent and Euclidean in their approach to their construction of space could be combined together to construct non-Euclidean spaces in which the implied size of the onlooker changed drastically from one image to the next, or in which spaces were connected in physically impossible ways [...] The change of size is indicated by the height of the viewpoint, the relative size of familiar objects, and the ability to enter spaces that would appear to be too small for a full-size person to enter. (161-162)

Such achievements are possible in video games. *The Path*, indeed, offers a beguiling example of how a recognisable world can be transformed. We observe, after all, spaces in which trees exist simultaneously as objects with which a character can both

pass through and collide. What is more, the ratio between intangibility and solidity in this instance seems entirely arbitrary.

Against these digital, interactive environments, cinema's analogue phenomenology restricts the potency of such effects peculiar to the video game when dealing with ostensibly real, contiguous, spaces. As discussed in relation to Cassavetes and Cronenberg's cinemas, however, the video game's possibility of undoing spatial logic can be seen as equivalent to the disruptive potential of *Videodrome*'s fusion of hand and gun or *Love Streams*' refusal of subjectivity. So, *The Path*'s capacity to disturb the logic of Euclidean space offers a *virtual* understanding of the visceral's ability to dislodge the viewer's equilibrium, illustrating the disruption of the viewer's sense of what an image means without necessarily showing the *actual* characteristics of disruption itself. Cassavetes and Cronenberg, then, as exponents of the visceral, similarly create environments that counteract the sense of film as meaningful construction even as we cannot correctly identify precisely where in these spaces the visceral occurs. Yet we might also, in this vein, position *The Path* as a force of instability in the manner of Cassavetes and Cronenberg's films. In particular, and with regards to the visceral, we might conclude that, in each of these instances there is the possibility of an unpredictable, elusive element contained as a locus of disturbance. This disturbance is possible, in other words, as an aspect of both cinema and the video game.

CONCLUSION: THE VISCERAL 'WOUNDS'

Earlier in this chapter, I briefly discussed early cinema as part of an initial enquiry into the visceral. In the context of this section, Cronenberg's and Cassavetes' films, when looked at historically, are an obvious exception. In analysing key sequences from *Videodrome* and *Love Streams*, however, the visceral aspects of these films are united by one crucial aspect: wordlessness. The silence of silent cinema, and the lack of dialogue in the sequences from each of the sound films therefore highlights that the essence of the visceral, in its capacity to fascinate and repulse, is optical: its effect on the viewer is transmitted through the ontological fact of the image in motion. Barthes' adoption of the term *punctum* to describe the *still* image thus seems inappropriate as a method of describing a characteristic of cinema, until one notes its

usefulness as way of conceptualising the visceral's capacity to wound. In this sense the visceral, as heir to Barthes' *punctum*, can invest in much of the language (such as 'wounding') to describe the visceral as effect without necessarily employing a purely pragmatic approach that will search for the visceral as if it were a phenomenological fact of the image rather than a condition of a particular type of production exemplified by the works of Cassavetes and Cronenberg.

In addition, then, Fried's thoughts on photography and the far broader category 'art,' introduces other ways of conceptualising the visceral while respecting its essential formlessness. Fried's definition of anti-theatricality can be applied to the visceral in its tendency to avoid, rather than invite viewer attention while still provoking a response. Of course, in Fried's terminology anti-theatricality occurs via what may be called 'true art' (Fried is thinking specifically of modernist painting and sculpture); the appearance of the visceral in film does not seem to rely on the artistic merit of the sequence in question, but that it occurs in opposition to the 'knowing,' theatrical presence of the special effect reveals the usefulness of Fried's categories with regard to understanding the visceral.

Broadly speaking, the visceral, in its capacity to wound, and in its inherent anti-theatricality, is delivered through the special effect as illustrated by the analogue filmed image, the imperfections of the special effect allowing the visceral to seep through. By contrast, the theatrical appears in the digital special effect that aspires towards perfection-through-seamlessness as mentioned by Cubitt. Cassavetes and Cronenberg thus negotiate images which, through their very incompleteness, allow the accidence of the visceral in. This being so, each director's analogue image, inasmuch as it is visceral, is in fact digital in the sense that written and spoken language is digital: discrete, that is; entirely disconnected from the images that surround it. The digital effect (as in CGI) meanwhile obeys the analogue laws of cinema: it is completely straightforward (one might even say readerly) and contiguous, containing denotative and connotative meanings in keeping with the film. Nonetheless, digitally-constructed images can have digital (and therefore visceral) contents; and in my discussion of video games, with particular emphasis on *The Path*, I demonstrated that not only can the visceral operate as a powerful aspect of a digital image, but that written language, no longer discrete and disconnected, can

actually not be visceral at all; written language, in other words, when employed as a purposeful enigma (as it is in *The Path*) is nothing more than a distraction, as meaningful and as in need of connection with the viewer as any digital special effect. The relationship between signifier and signified as it applies to the image, in these cases, is far more arbitrary than those between the words written for us on a computer monitor and their meanings.

As such, this chapter has discussed some important ways to speak of the visceral as resistant to ideas about the filmed (and interactive) image as a site for spectacle. In the following chapter, the depiction of cities (in particular London) in Cassavetes' *Husbands* and Cronenberg's *Eastern Promises*, looks at ways in which the visceral can be denies spatial logic. It also enquires as to how the demarcation and denial of a recognisable cinematic space undoes our ideological reasoning about how particular spaces, in particular the iconic cityscape, should be represented on film.

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[1] There is at least one more direct link to video games here, in the form of Cronenberg's *eXistenZ*, a film about 'plugging in' to a virtual world. The diegetic video game of *eXistenZ* itself, as a product in the physical world of the film, has the familiar, physical trappings of the video game console world – wired controllers, a central processing unit – but with a 'Cronenbergian' twist. The controllers, for instance, are ported physically to the central nervous system of the players via cords that are explicitly umbilical in design; and the controllers themselves are undulating, fleshy objects that respond to the user in ways that echo those of the sexualised mugwumps in *Naked Lunch*

[2] An interesting supplement to the home-spun Cassavetes fiction is the documentary *Cineastes de notre temps*, which in 1968 recorded a conversation with the director chaired by Hubert Knapp and Andre Labarthe. As both interviewers and camera operators, Knapp and Labarthe were able to follow Cassavetes as he prepared *Faces* for production. The interviews included one which took place in Cassavetes' convertible as he drives it through his neighbourhood in the Hollywood Hills, pre-empting the car chase in *Love Streams* even as the handheld camera reveals more of Hollywood than Cassavetes would habitually do in his films

[3] Tomasovic is referring to Sam Raimi, James Cameron and Peter Jackson in particular, but we may also presumably include in this list Michael Bay, Uwe Boll, Brett Ratner, Zack Snyder and Eli Roth

[4] This need to move beyond the attractions phase of video gaming was mentioned as part of Wolf's response to my question about non-narrative aspects of games following his fascinating paper on the history of imaginary worlds read at the Society for Cinema and Media Studies Conference (SCMS) in 2011. Among Wolf's research was the discovery of *The Book of Sir John Mandeville* (1357) an essentially plotless, yet detailed description of a fictional land

[5] A salient example can be seen in the advances made in the growing competence of the CGI featured in Raimi's *Spider-Man* films, dating from 2002-2007

[6] In *Shocking Representation* (2005), Lowenstein lucidly makes a point for another interpretation of the 'shock' factor attributed to the horror image. Here, the author argues that such images awaken methods by which viewers may deal with traumatic events that are very much part of the public consciousness. In a chapter on Cronenberg, Lowenstein sees in *Shivers* a capacity for allegory that elucidates the Canadian condition. Responding to Canadian authors Margaret Atwood and Robert Fothergill's charge that the state of national identity is "diseased" through a deep-rooted "inferiority complex caused by an uneasy proximity with its dominant American older brother" Lowenstein suggests that the parasites in Cronenberg's film "literalise, defamiliarise and subvert" this idea. For even though the 'diseased' characters in *Shivers* are subjected to "pain and death", they are also granted "savage life" enabling to rise up (as allegorical figures) beyond their allotted roles as inferior, younger brothers (148)

[7] Judd, Morris, Andre and Smith's Minimalism/literalism "was fuelled", according to Harrison and Wood, "by a quest for the core, a drive to strip away the inessentials from the practice of art. It resulted in a trek away from paintings and sculptures, to 'specific' objects [...]" (1999: 798). The form these specific objects took were geometric entities such as cubes. It is interesting to note that the arrival of Minimalism coincided with Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), the monolith in which, as Frayling has commented, resembles a Donald Judd sculpture (1995)

[8] *Jouissance* occurs in "the text that imposes a state of loss, that discomforts (perhaps to the point of a certain boredom), unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language" (1973: 14). In this way it accesses many of the responses we might associate with the visceral, particularly in the challenge to the viewer's assumptions about what film *should* do

[9] Fried italicises this point, emphasising its importance to his general theory of art versus theatre. Other statements singled out in this way include, "*The crucial distinction that I am proposing so far is between work that is fundamentally theatrical and work that is not*" (p130); "*The success, even the survival, of the arts has come increasingly to depend on their ability to defeat theatre*" (p139) and "*Art degenerates as it approaches the condition of theatre*" (p141)

[10] Clement Greenberg's seminal essay of the early 1960s, "Modernist Painting", offered well-argued support of art for art's sake. In singling Kant as the first Modernist, Greenberg sets out an aesthetic agenda which sets the tone for a discussion of the visceral, particularly with regard to its unwillingness to be categorised or explained outside the domain of experience. See Greenberg, 1999 [1965], pp754-60

[11] For a fascinating study of the pre-history of cinema, see *Film Before Film* (Werner Nekes, 1985)

[12] Films that employ the actor's acknowledgement of the camera are too numerous to mention in their entirety, yet even in Hollywood (and those films that follow the Hollywood style) this rule of transparency has been curtailed to the extent that the viewer who should not belong in the story world is encouraged into the diegesis via an address by the central character in films such as *Alfie* (Lewis Gilbert, 1966) and *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (John Hughes, 1986). In Welles' *Citizen Kane* (1941) Thatcher growls into the lens as he expresses frustration at Kane's cavalier wish to run a newspaper. More pertinently, perhaps, the idea of a cinematographic equivalent to the *punctum* cannot rely on the frontal gaze as a defining characteristic because, unlike the still photograph, the gaze is entirely ephemeral. The viewer will know this, and therefore has no control over how long he wishes to engage with the direct look of the person presented to him on film. The gaze of the person in the still photograph can be held for as long as the viewer wishes, or can bear. A perfect example of this

is the image used by Barthes in *Camera Lucida* of the criminal Lewis Payne, photographed in 1865 by Alexander Gardner. For Barthes, the *punctum* occurs as a realisation about the fate of this man: "He is dead and he is going to die..." (1981: 95). This photo can be looked at for as long as the viewer wishes to contemplate this hidden power of the image. However, as the photo also occurs in the film *Nightwatch* (*Nattevagten*, Ole Bornedal, 1994) in the night watch booth of the central character, it cannot be considered for any chosen length of time by the viewer as it is now 'on film' and subject to the same vagaries of camera movement and editing as any other element in the *mise-en-scene*

[13] Musser's article in fact quotes one of Fried's companion pieces to "Art and Objecthood," *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and the Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (1980). A more general concept of theatricality which does not explicitly cite Fried, can be found in articles on the cinema of attractions by Sobchack (2006) and in the seminal work by Gaudreault and Gunning, "Early Cinema as a Challenge to Film History" (2006 [1989])

[14] There are, of course, instances whereby serendipity does intervene in the creation of a digital image. Marks, for example, speaks of the fragility of digital media, particularly as a certain obsolence is programmed into our attitudes towards digital systems that are only a few years old, or even less: "Quicktime: a low-res digital video recording suitable for real-time transmission [...] marks a specific point in the development of the medium, already obsolete" (2002: 157). I make the point about this ephemerality and the arbitrary nature of code as it interferes with the smoothness of the image in my discussion of the video game *The Path* during this chapter. The major point being made about the differences between analogue and digital images here, is that, as Edlund states, there is greater precision and control over the computer-generated image; and a much greater capacity to amend mistakes in the digital realm, as if they never occurred

[15] The companion piece to *Videodrome* is possibly Cronenberg's later film, *eXistenZ* (1999) which also details the exposure to the stimuli of electronic media that engenders bodily transformation and confusion over what is real. Here, the locus of exposure occurs not through connection with the analogue television signal, but in the interactive realm of the video game. Interestingly, despite the virtual characteristics of the world into which the characters enter, the world itself remains entirely physical. In fact the film's striking palette of colours, walls with vivid islands of peeling paint evokes digitality no more than any other of Cronenberg's films that explore altered states. Indeed, the production design for *eXistenZ* is overseen by long-time Cronenberg collaborator Carol Spier, whose unearthly, submarine colours dominate *Dead Ringers* (1988)

[16] The limited system through which physical transformation is expressed using special effects in an analogue medium of course necessitates the cliché. It itself becomes a perverse parody of the shot-reverse-shot, often concerning two characters: the first being the one who is transformed, and the second a feminised (if not always feminine) onlooker who may scream in horror at the changes taking place before his or her eyes. In this sense the transformations that take place in much of Cronenberg's work are explicitly different, containing as they do both subject and onlooker within the same body, if not the same frame

[17]Other problematic special effects can be found elsewhere in *Videodrome* (such as the exploding television set at the close of the film which spews innards). However, perhaps the most notable of these sequences is the one from *Scanners*, which features "47 frames of gushing splatter gore" as a character's head explodes. The content of the head is a combination of elements (blood and offal) and textures that have little equivalence to the contents of a real human head, yet this "blood and

flesh" encompasses "every corner of the frame" (Mathijs, 2008: 74). Like the hand/gun transformation in *Videodrome*, the disgust factor is accompanied by a certain indescribable quality

[18] I dislike the term 'avatar' in reference to the player's character as it appears in a video game. In its associations with Hindu mysticism, avatar suggests a removal from visceral experience which does not coincide with the actual involvement the player has with the video game. For this reason, words like equivalent (as noun), correspondent or even figurant are preferable in their suggestion of a physical bond between player and image. There is even the term "homunculus," a curious and enticing description, redolent with physicality that 'avatar' (as I see it) lacks. Coined by McMahan (2006), the homunculus ("little man") was a miniature golem animated by the alchemist Paracelsus in the fifteenth century (291). However, through its appearance in Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006), brought to life in the form of a mandrake root by being fed milk and blood, the homunculus evokes a greater sense of human bodily connection to the player/viewer/user than the more spiritually-based term, 'avatar.' Del Toro, too, has expressed a love of the medium of video games, and has developed video game projects, as well as being influenced by game design in his film projects (see Herrero, 2010)

[19] Camper's argument is for the relevance of older style graphics that may still be utilised in the 3-D era. It is worth noting, however, that his argument for the continuation of more 'primitive' forms of video game aesthetics is based on an appreciation of their 'retro' stylings

[20] There are many ways in which user interaction may disrupt the intended purpose of the game: an inexplicable drop into a void that opens up beneath the player's feet in *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* (2002); the rotating head of a human character at the beginning of *Fallout: New Vegas* (2010). This of course does not include certain ways in which the player may intend to 'break' the game, as in the discovery of the ability to fly an otherwise unfliable vehicle in *Grand theft Auto III* (2001) to discover an area of code 'behind' the scenery of the city where the narrative gameplay takes place. This area contains a 'ghost town' of unused and placeholder artwork not intended to be discovered during the plot of the game

[21] What happens to the interactive medium once it overcomes this hollowness? Pixelux, a software company employed by LucasArts, is developing a "materials simulation system" known as DMM (Digital Molecular Matter), which may move the video game's virtual body closer towards verisimilitude. DMM "simulates the properties of the materials" that would hitherto have been created by "scripting" objects to behave in particular ways. In other words, DMM objects are 'solid' and are able to "deform" in ways that reproduce their real life counterparts (or the way objects made of similar materials such as flesh and stone would in a physics-based world that corresponds with our understanding of such laws as gravity, texture, and so forth). See Edge, 2010: 114-115 and the company website: www.pixelux.com (Accessed 9 January 2011)

[22] As video art, Allen's piece may be closer to avant-garde expressions of experiment than to the visceral *per se*. However, it is a useful illustration of how these images are built. With the inclusion of interactivity in the media text the viewer, transformed into the player, is given the opportunity to disrupt the intended purpose of text and reveal the constructed characteristics of the image

[23] The promotional poster for *Hard Candy* has the image of Hayley, her back to the viewer, in a red coat and standing in between the enormous, open jaws of a bear trap. This codified image makes the links between the contemporary tale and a much older classic of folklore irresistible and entirely unavoidable

[24] Accidence is precisely the accident of inspiration which is only possible through imperfection, as Bazin finds in the works of the Italian neorealists (see Cubitt, p251)

[25] As mentioned in the earlier chapter, "The Visceral: from Adjective to Noun"

[26] The desire to merge with virtual worlds and virtual characters is also discussed in Furze and Brereton, 2011, "The Digital Cabinet of Curiosities: *Avatar* and the phenomenology of 3-D worlds" [publication forthcoming]

[27] Rather than attempt to explain this 'imaginary model,' I instead choose to include an illustration of it in "Appendix A: The Visceral (a relational model)"

CHAPTER FIVE

CITIES

The previous chapter touched on spectacle, special effects and the video game through the theories of Barthes and the lenses of Cassavetes and Cronenenberg's cinemas. To follow these themes, we shall expand our focus from the intimate fictions of a hand being fused with a gun in *Videodrome* or the pursuit of a car pursuing a boy in *Love Streams*, or even the merging of a little girl with a forest in *The Path*. We shall move to the city, the space in which many of Cassavetes and Cronenberg's films play out. In doing so, we are presented with the opportunity to examine how the visceral plays out in a world recognisable to our own, lived experience. As Kofman and Lebas (2003) via critics such as Simmel (1998 [1903]) and in particular Lefebvre (1998; 2003)[1] remind us, the city is an ideological entity, despite the assertion by the "technocrat" that the urban space is simply a "mechanical operation" (Kofman and Lebas, 2003: 22). This chapter, then, will discuss how we view the city in ideological terms, and how the images of Cassavetes and Cronenberg's films undo these ideological views of the urban space.

Both directors do film in urban locations. The mobility of the Cassavetes shoot allows lightweight Arriflex cameras (Kouvaros, 2004: 70-71) to enter the city (*Shadows*, *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie*) the suburbs (*Faces*, *A Woman under the Influence*) and the homes of the characters in both environments. Cronenberg's home city of Toronto becomes a backdrop to many of his films such as *Rabid*, *Dead Ringers* and so on.[2] But of course, as in other examples of their films alluded to in the other chapters, how they choose to depict these locations is very different, as will be demonstrated here. However, an unusual (we might say serendipitous) connection brings these two filmmakers together as we begin to discuss their relationship to the urban environment. For despite being regarded as resolutely North American directors,[3] they have made films that take place in the same city: London. This chapter will therefore concentrate on this place shared by both filmmakers.

This fact automatically determines the films from which a theory of the visceral with regard to cities and ideology may be gathered: Cassavetes' *Husbands* was filmed partly in and around the centre of London (most notably the Sportsman's Casino on Old Quebec Street, off the main retail area of Oxford Street); and Cronenberg's *Spider* features sequences shot in St Pancras Station and Lambeth. His *Eastern Promises* features many more locations, from Chelsea Football Club in the west of the city to the Thames Barrier, which is at the eastern edge of the city, in Greenwich.

Many of these spaces are charged with ideological significance, and are weighed with historical and touristic importance. This chapter argues that these sites are denied their full scope to soar as signifiers of 'London-ness' in both Cassavetes and Cronenberg's films. Sequences from Cassavetes' *Husbands* will be discussed here, of course. For Cronenberg, however, I have decided to concentrate almost exclusively on one set of shots from *Eastern Promises*. It is a part of the film that has troubled me more than any other (far more, for example, than the fight scene in the sauna). It is the image of the character of Anna crossing one of London's many bridges on her motorbike. As I analyse this sequence I explain why it troubles me, and include my own collection of photographs (taken as part of my research on this chapter) to illustrate the ways in which this sequence may be regarded as visceral.[4] The visceral, that is, defined as an image containing a hidden, inexplicable, or (in this case) even a missing meaning.

Barthes' writings on architecture (such as his essay on the Eiffel Tower) will usefully illustrate how Cassavetes and Cronenberg deny the city the chance to express its identity. His thoughts on terror will also link this capacity to obstruct meaning to more adequately equate this tendency for these films to deny London-ness with both recent and historical tragedies in the real world (New York's 9/11; London's Blitz, and its own terrorist attack in July 2005 (the so-called 7/7 bombings)). In its own way, however, the chapter concludes that the visceral reappropriates the meaning of city spaces and their objects which is read through an ideologically-inflected lens, as subterfuge.

It is worth beginning here with ideological views of the city, and how these shape our understanding of how a city's aesthetic – particularly one of such recognisability as London's – should be perceived, and what happens when that viewpoint is

regarded as being undermined by the visceral. Two contemporary examples will illustrate this.

PRINCES AND SHARDS: IDEOLOGY'S RESPONSE TO THE VISCERAL

On 9 December, 2010 in London's Parliament Square, demonstrators gathered protesting the vote passed by the United Kingdom's Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government to increase the cost of university tuition fees. It was "a peaceful, calm protest", but "then came the violence" (Addley, et al, 2010: 6). The conflict between the crowds and police lines resulted in injuries and arrests, the police blaming the violence on "a continued unprovoked attack by protestors"; demonstrators, meanwhile, "complained of excessive force, including baton charges on foot and horseback" (Wintour and Watt, 2010: 2). Property was also damaged: after the violence had dispersed, workers with high pressure hoses were cleaning graffiti daubed on a statue of Winston Churchill; but the headline news in the British media was the attack on a car containing the Prince of Wales and his wife, Camilla, "by protestors who threw paint and cracked a window of the car [...] The prince's spokesman said they were unharmed." The press photo of the incident (by Matt Dunham) shows a high-contrast image of Charles and Camilla open-mouthed, reacting to the attack. Electric sparks of colour spray the picture, flares of reflected light on the passengers' near side window and the blurred illumination of Argyll Street behind them. Merged with this chaos of colour at the back of the frame is a hooded face. Indistinct, it presumably belongs to one of the protestors (1).

Set for completion in 2012, 'The Shard' is a building designed by architect Renzo Piano in the urban site of London Bridge Place, close to the south bank of the Thames at the intersection of the Tube's Jubilee and Northern Lines. Piano envisages the building as a reference to London's architectural heritage, but also to the city's maritime history as a port for trade and conquest: "The shape of the tower is generous at the bottom and narrow at the top, disappearing in the air like a 16th century pinnacle or the mast top of a very tall ship. The architecture of The Shard is firmly based in the historic form of London's masts and spires" (Piano, in Sellar, 2008: 10). The Shard's appearance in the London skyline is not entirely welcome, however, with English Heritage calling it an "inappropriate" addition to the capital's

vertical landscape, mostly owing to its possible "impact" on views of St Paul's Cathedral from Parliament Hill, based on its scale. At 310 metres high it will be 75 metres taller than the city's One Canada Square. 30 St Mary Axe ('The Gherkin') is a mere 180 metres tall by comparison (Dangerfield, 2010).

Here, the protest and the building are contemporary examples of the visceral at work: the first a chaotic act; the second a quiet sliver of disturbance. Both transform the profile of how the city as ideological entity views itself. They also coordinate with the image of Cassavetes and of Cronenberg as, respectively, exponents of the list and of emptiness detailed in earlier chapters. The protest in Parliament Square fragments despite the police's efforts to "kettle" (contain) the demonstrators (Addley, et al, 2010: 6-7), the damage spilling into other streets, just as Cassavetes expands his scenes (the singing contest in *Husbands*) across time and the space of the *mise-en-scene*. More pertinently, perhaps, the depiction of signage in *Shadows* offers a more direct parallel. Night sequences in the film are overloaded with information: New York's neon-lit facades saturating the screen, just as the banners of the London protestors resist curtailment and break out of Parliament Square. Both the Cassavetes film and the protest are 'senseless' in their excess; a term borne of an ideological viewpoint that finds in these chaotic events (the filmed event, the media event) a resistance to meaning. The incomprehensibility and undesirability of the visceral is evident in the reporting of the London demonstration as a riot, its reasons (a protest over student fees) lost in the blazing smog around the faces of the British heir to the throne and his wife, and a sinister, hooded face suspended dangerously behind them. The visceral, here, is actively encouraged by the myth of the photograph: the royal couple – symbols of England, of London – isolated in the midst of abstract and semi-abstract shapes. Here the sign is a slurred articulation of violence, its true signifier-signified relationship (civil rights) resisted, superseded by a condemnation of 'what England has become.' To allow the protest its full expression would be to question the homogenous view of Englishness personified by the Royal Family as a narrative 'fact' of the country's ancestry. The visceral purpose of the demonstration (*qua V for Vendetta*, mentioned in the introductory chapter) is overthrown by the images of violence; what is lost is the convergence of the event and its implied source (the tension between the 'haves' and the 'have nots'), which itself would force an interrogation of the ideology of power relations in

British society. Similarly, the unreserved acceptance of Cassavetes' excess would effectively raise questions about the hegemony of cinematic narrative.

Piano's The Shard offers a version of Cronenberg's emptiness evidenced in our earlier chapter on language and narrative, "John Cassavetes and David Cronenberg: Lists and Emptiness." The tower's forceful absence imposed on the skyline is a ghostly wall of steel and glass mirroring the colours of the London climate: "After a shower it will be blue. In the evening it will become warmer and more red" (Piano in Dangerfield, 2010). Its explicit emptiness is even evident in its name. As Sansom (1994) observes, 'shard' has no meaning except as a descriptive noun; alone the word is nonspecific. It must be a shard *of something*, and while it can be more fully designated as "The Shard of Glass," (Dangerfield, 2010) the colloquial abbreviation the Shard seems to be the more common epithet (Sellar, 2008). As with the student demonstration, the Shard assaults and disrupts the conceptions and specificities of London-ness as heritage site and as tourist destination. London architecture should designate London-ness, but in its enormity, its prodigious absence,[5] the Shard becomes a signifier that has no signified. It means nothing. We might say then that, certainly in the historical, real-life cases put forward here, ideology actively promotes the visceral *ahead* of meaning in an effort to convey the unwelcome chaos of events that have little or no worth in societal terms.

These real-world examples are sufficient to illustrate how the visceral is seen as an unwelcome, resistant force opposing the set, ideological views of London.[6] Moving on to the films of Cassavetes and Cronenberg, the suggestion here (as in earlier chapters) is that their films are *actually* visceral. Ideology does not exclude them from meaning for its own purposes; they have already excluded themselves. We shall see this as we begin by discussing Cronenberg's *Eastern Promises* as a fictional text that also disrupts the established meaning of the touristic site.

EASTERN PROMISES

Writing about *Eastern Promises* is partly about my own journey, revisiting locations from the film. In this section I include photographs of some the places used during the shoot. The first of these is the 'Finsbury Borough Council Public Baths and Wash Houses'[7] used as an external setting for a meeting between Nikolai and Azim.

What is apparent here is that locations do change: the written word, above the door, is different from the title of the place as it is known locally.[8] This is the prodiegetic fact of place before the film intercedes and transforms it into somewhere else, both familiar and strange.

The northern entrance to the Finsbury bath house is clearly marked in the sequence from the film in which Nikolai and Azim enter through its doors. The words retain its designation for the film, even as its sign has become merely a part of the fanlight dressing above the door's function, both largely invisible and inconsequential as a name for the place. For although it establishes a logical access into the ensuing interiors of *Eastern Promises*, the official name has long been superseded, the building now taking on the appellation of its street: the Ironmonger Row public baths. The ancient markings can be found above the east entrance, where much of the lettering has fallen away, and not been replaced (Figure 15).

Figure 15: Ironmonger Row Bath House (Author's collection)

This is the 'London-ness' of *Eastern Promises*. That the camera focuses on the sign, climbing above the heads of Nikolai and Azim as they enter the bath house, offers a reassuring geography one associates with the establishing shot (as in the opening of Hitchcock's *Stage Fright*). There are, however, significant departures from this tradition.

The introduction of London-ness in *Eastern Promises* comes relatively late. Much of the plot has already been established, including the brutally inept murder of a man in a barber's chair. Then there is the main plotline, beginning with the death of a

young teenage girl at the moment she gives birth to a daughter, Christine, who will effectively be the Hitchcockian Maguffin that is the catalyst for many of the events in the rest of the film. In fact, London only appears once the catalysts of birth and death, bound in blood as they are, have presented the rudiments of a structure from which the narrative can evolve. As such, London too is conceived of this blood, with a shot of the newborn Christine, viscous and red matched with the image of a London bus, unrecognisable in extreme close-up. This transition is typical of the way in which the film subverts cinematic concepts of "landmark London" and the more universal "'landmark montage', which functions as an establishing shot sequence at the beginning of a film, or to mark a move in location" (Brunsdon, 2007: 22).

Hitchcock's film becomes paradigmatic of the ways in which cinema can critique the touristic view of the city. *Stage Fright* does not begin for the viewer with a privileged view *across* the urban landscape towards a landmark view of St. Paul's Cathedral, but *at* a theatrical safety curtain that slowly rises to reveal the 'real' city behind it. This device of course offers a pun on the film's title and an introduction to major concerns (a murder mystery among stage actors), but furthermore the "joke of the theatrical curtain rising on cinematic reality, rather than theatrical artifice, can only confirm the accomplishment of the cinematic artifice employed." This model of artifice, set up in the opening moments of a film, and continued directly through the use of a "two-shot of the occupants of a sports car" as a way of presenting a 'false alibi' for what will be one the plot's chief suspects (who is indeed the murderer), henceforth creates an atmosphere of unease about the veracity of iconography *vis a vis* the moving image. While it may be true "the narrative significance of the speeding car is overwhelmed by the dramatic, self-conscious staging of St. Paul's in post-war London" (21), the fact that the spectacle is enclosed between two synthetic images (one theatrical, the other narrative) is significant enough to force the viewer to re-evaluate incontrovertible assumptions around conventions of landmark representation as establishing a sense of place, particularly a viewer coming to the film a second time.

Stage Fright's opening shots ultimately undo the alibi of cinema as a medium committed to telling the truth: how much can one believe the image of St. Paul's when the associated shots (can one call them accomplices, in keeping with the theme

of the alibi?) are so unequivocally fictional? The questions raised by Hitchcock are continued in Barthes' *Mythologies*, wherein the device of the alibi is given full expression in discussions over the disparity between the objectivity of the animal senses and the subjectivity of culture: "in the alibi [...] there is a place which is full and one which is empty, linked by a relation of negative identity ('I am not where you think I am; I am where you think I am not')" (Barthes, 2000 [1957]: 123). Through the establishing shot of the landmark, any film can insist on its innocence by pointing out that the universality of the image offers a shortcut to orienting the viewer to a particular time and place (post-war London). Yet in positioning a frontal image of St. Paul's (or indeed similarly framed views of the Houses of Parliament and Tower Bridge or the London Eye and 30 St. Mary Axe ('the Gherkin')) at the beginning of a film has ideological implications. It is not enough to claim that these structures have been engineered into aspects of culture, for culture, too, "has become an alibi, a concept that, by dint of its object status in social theory, is now an excuse for othering, marginalizing, and ethnicising. The concept of 'culture,' like its offspring 'tradition' and its parent 'civilization,' today blocks rather than facilitates the communication of change" (Cubitt, 2004: 300-1). The opening of *Stage Fright* goes part of the way into revealing (as opposed to revelling in) the myths that exist in the alibi of culture; but *Eastern Promises* (and Cassavetes' *Husbands*, to be discussed later) go much further in deconstructing the filmic view of the city.

VIEWS FROM BRIDGES

Five consecutive views of London from *Eastern Promises*: the first has already been alluded to in reference to the bus whose colour matches the previous image of the newborn baby. However, the shot continues, moving from an oblique angle of the adjacent bus to a perspective of the bridge on which it rides, not merely to catch the motorcycle that pushes between bus and camera, taking off into the middle distance but also to continue panning in order to accommodate the architecture of the city and a vista along the Thames.

Anna's ride across the Thames offers enough clues to situate her in a particular time and place; most notably 30 St. Mary Axe and Tower Bridge, which informs the viewer that she is travelling north. But on which bridge is she travelling? Distances

from landmark sites certainly help to verify Anna's location, but it is in defining secondary landmarks that prove crucial here; in particular, Cannon Street Station with its trains just visible behind the barrier of Cannon Street Bridge. Anna, then, is on Southwark Bridge, travelling north from South Bank to Upper Thames Street and Cheapside (as seen in the centre of the map in Figure 16).
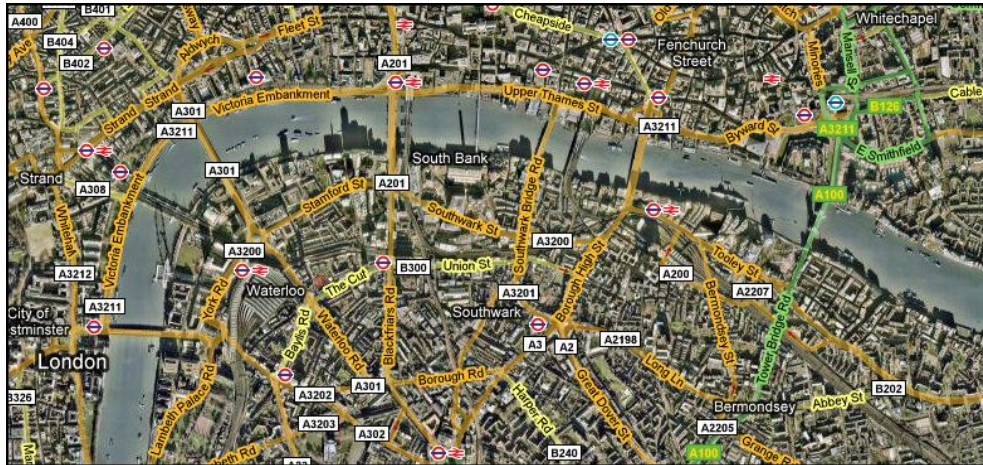

Figure 16: London's South Bank, and environs (Google Maps, accessed 10 March 2009)

Following, recreating and, eventually locating Anna's journey is itself a method of deconstructing the city;[9] but that there is a necessity in doing so already undermines the touristic view of the city. 30 St. Mary Axe and Tower Bridge are here, but have dwindled: either behind less iconic buildings (Cannon Street Station);[10] or as architecture viewed through a haze, on the horizon. Cronenberg's characteristic "wide-angle lens composition" (Mathijs, 2008: 5) only serves to deepen these landmark sites' sense of remoteness. Comparing the actual decisions made about where to position the camera against its theoretical placement offers further insight into this tendency to isolate the touristic with the ambition to reduce its relevance. First there is the choice of bridge. Of the seven bridges featured on the map in Figure 16, each affords the possibility of a touristic snapshot. Waterloo Bridge, for instance, (the A301 on the map: Figures 17 and 18) suggests good views of several landmarks that could have been included in the same panning shot, and at far closer availability than in the shot Cronenberg opted for. Of course, there are other forces at work that influence the choice of location (council permissions and other bureaucratic logistics); except if the camera had been placed on the opposite side of

the bridge and swept west instead of east it would have discovered a much closer view of another iconic structure: St. Paul's Cathedral.

Figure 17: View from Waterloo Bridge looking east towards 30 St. Mary Axe ('The Gherkin') and St Paul's Cathedral (Author's collection)

Figure 18: The London Eye and Big Ben seen from Waterloo Bridge looking west (Author's collection)

Figure 19: View from Southwark Bridge looking north west towards St. Paul's Cathedral (Author's collection)

Cronenberg's choice of view plays with the myth of London: landmarks are not merely diminished but diminishing: the Gherkin and Tower Bridge appearing to sink into the other structures and the river, respectively; and the haze that surrounds them a smog that threatens to destroy them utterly, following a reverse incentive to the opening and closing vistas of *Mary Poppins* (Robert Stevenson, 1964) which, as noted by Shonfield (2000: 135) operates a "thorough-going doctoring: every part of London that is not deemed a recognisable object is swathed in a useful fog."

As detailed previously in his commitment to espousing emptiness, the city of objects is antithetical to the Cronenberg ethos: in conversation with Rodley about the filming of *M. Butterfly* (1993) in China, the director speaks of "his determination and ability to subordinate landscape" (Rodley, 1997: 177):

> I didn't want it to be like the *Russia House* [Fred Schepisi, 1990], for example, which [...] I didn't think was very successful artistically because there was this obsession with showing you the real streets of Leningrad and so on. The camera was drifting to show you what was outside the window when really you just wanted to see the actors' faces. I couldn't believe how often the camera would just steadicam its way over to see the nice onion domes and stuff. I thought, 'God I don't want to make that mistake.' In *M. Butterfly* the stuff is there when it's there. Some of the stuff I really wanted to capture most was the feel in the backstreets of Beijing because I'd never seen that before. You always see Tiananmen Square or the Forbidden City. I didn't want to be a tourist [...] (178)

London's tourist sites are "distinct from their surroundings, sticking out from their physical context" (Shonfield, 2000: 133). This, in other words, is the successful commodification of the city, in which the "large cultural building" (132-133) is "immediately 'saleable' to the people" (133). Within the context of film, the people to whom the cultural object is sold are not only immediate, but global. Cronenberg's resistance to these sites as cultural necessities brings into focus the alibi of culture. The visceral effect of this resistance is a feeling of displacement; of being jettisoned from a comforting world, and the safety of objects dwelling within well-defined edges and boundaries.

The oppositions at work here are those of solidity versus transience, confronted by Barthes in his two essays on architecture, "Semiology and the Urban" (1997a [1967])

and "The Eiffel Tower" (1997b [1979]), and his short book on Japan, *Empire of Signs* (1970); writings that are very much in the spirit of, and continue the quest begun in *Mythologies*: to analyse the relationship of the signified to the signifier in an effort to demystify the signs that permeate mass culture. For Barthes, in the years since *Mythologies*, the "value" (Barthes (2000 [1957]: 123) of the alibi with regards to architecture and the city is a matter (and this word is highly appropriate here) of "urban functionalism": the importance of the architectural sign relies on it being understood as "a functional concept and not a semantic concept" (Barthes, 1967: 171).

The distinction is thus: whereby the function of architecture indicates "an organisation of meaning" in the manner of a "syntagmatic" or "paradigmatic" reading; in short how buildings fit in with the 'grammar' of the city (169). Architecture as semantic concept, on the other hand, allows for the drift of meaning; that "semiology never supposes the existence of a definitive signified" (170). The opening of *Mary Poppins* conforms to the paradigm of London's historicity in its revelation of recognisable sites, existing additionally as sights; as places of pleasure. And, as Barthes reminds the reader, "the place of pleasure is one of the most tenacious mystifications of urban functionalism" (170-171). The London-ness of St. Paul's at the beginning of *Stage Fright*, however is put under additional scrutiny: the questionable authenticity of event and *mise-en-scene* elsewhere in the film hinders its function (as landmark; as heritage) allowing a further semantic reading to be considered (a signified that destabilises certain ideas about Britishness, for example). Hitchcock's London, in this instance, rediscovers ways in which signifieds may be loosed from the moorings of their signifiers: even in the signification of landmark architecture signifieds can be "extremely imprecise", so that, even though signifiers are consistent (they "remain") their "signifieds are transient". However, while this approach is effective in partially subverting the iconicity of the image, *Eastern Promises*' view from Southwark Bridge succeeds in achieving something that goes much further in questioning the veracity (and thereby also encountering the visceral core) of the image; by distilling the concept of signifieds that "always become the signifiers of something else" into what Barthes calls "the empty signified" (169).

In a theory of urban geography, empty signifieds are "understood as signifying rather by their own correlative position than by their contents." In a preliminary analysis of Tokyo's "tangled urban complexes", for instance, Barthes finds "a kind of centre. But this centre, occupied by the imperial palace, surrounded by a deep moat and hidden by greenery, is felt as an empty centre." Such impenetrability forces a draining of semantic meaning: there can be no signifieds when the signifiers are hidden. Barthes also locates this trend as "a more general rule":

> the studies of the urban nucleus of different cities has shown that the central point of the city centre (every city has a centre) which we call 'solid nucleus', does not constitute the peak point of any particular activity but a kind of empty 'focal point' for the image that the community develops of the centre. We have here again a somehow empty place which is necessary for the organisation of the rest of the city. (169)

The myth of a 'working centre' is precisely how filmic representations of the city operate: these buildings have an aesthetic purpose (they signify London). Meanwhile the shot from *Eastern Promises* denies functionality and the *en abyme* semantic chain of signifier begetting signified begetting signifier by operating on two contradictory levels, setting the touristic and the mundane against each other. Thus the London-ness of the bus at the beginning of the shot is undone by its proximity to the camera (it is too close to be recognised as a bus) and its anonymity (the design is more modern than the curved chassis of the classic one in *Summer Holiday* (Peter Yates, 1962) for instance; its destination is not revealed[11]); while its emblematic redness has already been distorted through the images of blood that have permeated the *mise-en-scene* up to that point. The camera pans in a manner that suggests a view of *something*, a *panorama*, but discloses only enough of London (dwindling and faded vistas of Tower Bridge and 30 St. Mary Axe) so that it may immediately be denied its status as a city of history, of culture, and of *function*.

Function, then, allied as it is to paradigmatic and syntagmatic readings of the city follows a certain metonymic pattern, and can be mapped across definitions of language, as noted by Michael Moriarty (1992) in his interpretation of Barthes' semiology:

> The relationships between elements in a paradigm may be called substitutive, since by definition any element may be substituted for any other [...], that is to say, can occupy the same position within it. Dealing with other combinations over time (or, in other systems such as clothing, space) the syntagmatic is the dimension of *parole*; whereas since the paradigmatic covers selection from the categories established by a system, its associations are with *langue*. (Moriarty, 1992: 85)

Within the context of London in film, the mobile panorama is one of several (but finite) ways of introducing the city (substituted, for instance by a static, but frontally privileged image or an overhead deified view as in *Stage Fright* or *Mary Poppins*). In other words, it is the *langue* of the establishing shot, which in turn must choose which landmark to position in the *parole*. As Moriarty indicates, these are aspects of time: they fit into the diegesis of the world within which narrative unfolds. *Eastern Promises* waits four and a half minutes before unveiling its panorama: it is out of step with those major plot points that have already occurred; the urban-ness (even the London-ness) of *Eastern Promises* has been confirmed itself before the activation of the establishing shot. This is reminiscent of Kristin Thompson's observations on the superfluity "of multiple devices to serve similar functions" in "The Concept of Cinematic Excess" (2004). Function here, again, implies the paradigmatic and syntagmatic usefulness of the device; which, when overused only serves "to expand the narrative 'vertically'" (518).

Thompson's use of spatial metaphor in illustrating the concept of excess (verticality) versus narrative (horizontality) is a useful method by which to understand the visceral effect that occurs in Cronenberg's depiction of the city panorama. Barthes, certainly, speaks of language in such terms, referring to Saussure's "demonstration" of the sign "as the vertical extension of a situation in depth", albeit to warn that "excessively spatial metaphors miss the dialectical nature of signification" (Barthes, 1968: 15).[12] Nonetheless, in the discussion of film, he borrows from Eisenstein's theory of a "vertical reading" of montage to delineate the "obtuse meaning" that prevails outside the purely informational and symbolic realms of the moving image (Barthes, 1977: 64; also Eisenstein, 1942). Finally, in the essay "Structural Analysis of Narratives" Barthes finds the existence of vertical (indicial) and horizontal (functional) relationships within actants, the fundamental structures upon which narratives are based:

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> Indices, because of the, in some sort, vertical nature of their relations, are truly semantic units: unlike 'functions' (in the strict sense), they refer to a signified, not to an 'operation.' The ratification of indices is 'higher up', sometimes even remaining virtual, outside any explicit syntagm [...]. That of functions, by contrast, is always 'further on', is a syntagmatic ratification. *Functions* and *indices* thus overlay another classic distinction: functions involve metonymic relata, indices metaphoric relata; the former correspond to a functionality of doing, the latter to a functionality of being. (Barthes, 1977: 93)

Within this schema, horizontal readings of the text (narrative, image) are concerned with the itemisation of time: metonymy's sequential rendering of phenomena into categories; the logical 'this follows that'; the machinery of grammar. Vertical readings, meanwhile, stall the temporal progression of narrative, weighing individual aspects of the image with meanings that inform the horizontal interpretation. This implies the wilful concentration of the individual's attention on the signified, so that he becomes a reader of signs to facilitate his understanding of the chronology; hence in those excessive aspects of narratives alluded to by Thompson the signifieds are imposed upon the signifiers, thereby creating an anomalous circumstance in which images surpass all possible meanings. There are, in short, more signifieds than signifiers. In such a circumstance one encounters the 'empty signified,' or the signified that is never "finite or fixed" alluded to by Barthes in his essay on the Eiffel Tower, the subject of which "is a complete verb, both active and passive, in which no function, no *voice* [...] is defective." He continues,

> the Tower [is] a singular monument; for the world ordinarily produces either purely functional organisms (camera or eye) intended to see things but which then afford nothing to sight, what *sees* being mythically linked to what remains *hidden* (this is the theme of the voyeur), or else spectacles which themselves are left blind and are left in the pure passivity of the visible. (Barthes, 1997b [1979]: 173)

In terms of spatial metaphors, some of the language used to describe the visceral in relation to the special effect as detailed in the last chapter – vis-a-vis the special effect's theatrical 'reaching out' to the viewer in direct opposition to the visceral's antitheatrical tendency to elude and draw away from the viewer – one further dimension can be usefully applied: the z-axis. The horizontal (diachronic) extension of image into narrative structure automatically conveys an intellectual process; verticality's synchronic potential is certainly in the employment of a 'stack of meanings,' but more importantly can be intellectualised as it is literally representable

as surface on a screen; exploiting a phrase such as 'stack of meanings' usefully illustrates exactly how easily the vertical plane can be actualised in language. The z-axis, on the other hand, cannot be so readily assembled: "The z-axis, which is perpendicular to the picture plane and traces the trajectory to and away from the viewer, is not physically present in a two-dimensional plane, so it differs from the x-axis and y-axis in that it can only be implied in an image" (Wolf, 2009: 151). Techniques that project an illusion of depth can be found in even the earliest examples of art in two dimensions – after all, simply marking the surface of a canvas automatically implies depth – yet what the visceral effectively does is upset conventions of rational, discursive praxis. In this way it interrupts the logic of the virtual depth of plane by blocking both diachronic and synchronic meaning.

An example of this can be found in the image which completes Anna's ride across Southwark Bridge in *Eastern Promises* (Figure 20). At first glance (particularly as a still image) the perspectival relations are perfectly sound: linear perspective diminishes the apparent size of objects, from Anna's gloved hands gripping the gears of the motorcycle back to Anna herself, the cars, a few pedestrians, street-side buildings (modern glass and concrete on the left, a rusticated town address 'To Let' on the right), a slice of bridge, distant buildings (what looks like the gable end of an enormous Queen Anne hotel on the left and an even larger office complex on the right) and a clear sky at the back of the composition.

Figure 20: *Eastern Promises* (David Cronenberg, 2007 [©Pathe/20th Century Fox]) Screen capture

Figure 21: *The Birds* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1963 [©Universal Pictures]) Screen capture

There is a certain familiar iconography to the shot, which returns one to Hitchcock: see, for example a view of Melanie Daniels in a rowing boat equipped with an outboard motor in *The Birds* (Figure 21). The dominance of the figure of the female star in each case is far less surprising than her refusal to fasten herself to those elements of the *mise-en-scene* that surround her. The impulse to use the verb 'surround', rather than employ a preposition such as 'behind' demonstrates the marked contrast between human and landscape: Anna and Melanie are not figures in the *mise-en-scene*, they are cut out and cut apart from it. There is one crucial difference between the two images, however, and it is from this difference that all other differences emerge, as it involves a diachronic understanding of each film in relation to the other. A viewer with even the haziest knowledge of film history will recognise that *The Birds* is significantly older than *Eastern Promises*: codes of dress and of fashion dictate a lot, of course, but a certain quality to the film stock (35mm Technicolor in Hitchcock; 35mm Kodak in Cronenberg) is the true indicator. As

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such Melanie's removal from the background can be explained more than adequately: she is sat in a boat behind which a film of water and landscape – probably shot by a second-unit team – is projected. The return of the preposition also delivers a comforting realisation to the viewer: that this was the way movies were made 'back then', further allowing for Hitchcock's insistence on mastery over the *mise-en-scene*, stemming from the fact that he "had begun in the 1920s as an art director and had quickly learned that by designing the set he could control not only the visual look of the film but also its dramatic development" (Wollen, 2002: 206). But what then of Anna?

The London of *Eastern Promises* successfully relinquishes its touristic roots in the shots preceding this one, and the recreation of the city as a Hitchcockian rear projection further alienates it from diachronic meaning: through the idiom of digital technology, the 'primitive' technique of back projection is made redundant; and in the development of the sequence as cause and effect, that the previous shots are so obviously filmed on location renders Anna's luminescent separateness[13] from the crude urban landscape as evidence of the fallibility of the concept: London.

This is how Barthes' thoughts on the *punctum* are discovered in cinema. As noted previously he states that one needs to close one's eyes to fully appreciate the wound of the photograph. Watching those first few minutes of *Eastern Promises*, watching Anna's drive across the bridge, the film inevitably offers new images for me to watch: the film effectively closes my eyes for me, displacing each moving image with another, a diachronic development of meaning. But that single shot stays with me, its insistent break from diachrony and synchrony. For the shot of Anna evokes an even more complex relationship with London and the past, since it is not in actuality a figure filmed in front of a moving back projection (if it were it could be dismissed as intentional, even ironic) but a figure filmed in a London location that appears to be a moving back projection. Intent, therefore, becomes spurious, its 'reasoning' hidden. No matter how many times one replays it, it reeks of artificiality even as all available evidence points to its authenticity as part of a location shoot (Anna is filmed on a motorcycle perched on the platform of a low loader truck[14]). This sense of artificiality is easy to pinpoint of course, particularly when compared to the shot of Melanie from *The Birds*: in each case the actress is preternaturally still

even as the motion of the landscape suggests she should be involuntarily moving (shifting in the boat; shaking on the motorbike; her hair blowing in the wind); an effect added to by the several planes of depth that intervene between the actress and the nearest geographical feature behind her so that she appears to hover (luminescently, I repeat) over the *mise-en-scene*. Note, here, how even the term *mise-en-scene* is inadequate to describe Melanie and Anna; as if they somehow are removed not only from the diegesis of landscape, but from the entire film. As previously discussed, the viewer's first instinct to separate Melanie from landscape is short-lived of course, but Anna's disconnection from landscape cannot be so easily conceptualised.

TERROR

This being so, perhaps the most important of the techniques employed to remove Anna from the background is Cronenberg's use of the wide-angle lens, which serves not only to push London to the back of the image, but to bend the buildings at the edge of the screen in. This is where the true prepositional redundancy exists: London appears to be in the process of being sucked in to the centre of the screen, so that buildings which appear to be behind Anna suddenly become the closest of objects, pulled into a vortex that simultaneously retains a dominant solidity in the form of Anna's tar-black jacket, goggles and helmet.

So it is that the centre of the screen becomes a void that pulls all meaning from the *mise-en-scene*. The first meaning it nullifies is how objects relate to each other in space. The virtual concept of depth-of-field becomes useless, and in its place is trauma: "a suspension of language, a blocking of meaning" (Barthes, 1977, in Sayer, 2008: 12). As Lowenstein states, "Trauma [...] is narrated traditionally as enacting a shocking rupture between private self and public community." On Cronenberg, he continues, that the films remind us "mythologies of the self and nation have *never* been natural" (2005: 146). Lowenstein is referring particularly to the explicit traumas of the horror film, but I suggest here that Cronenberg's denial of London-ness (outside of the context of genre) is also capable of denying this exchange between personal and national identity.

Trauma, then, is close to the correct word to unwrap the feelings engendered by the destruction of the identity of place, for it reminds one of the forced silence that occurs at the site of tragedy, of the site of tragedy as the vortex that absorbs language. The other word is 'wound,' already used by Barthes to explain how the *punctum* affects the onlooker of the photograph and how the visceral disturbs the viewer of the moving image. Yet cities can be wounded too, by "natural catastrophes, urban terrorism, civil and pre-emptive wars in addition to traditional warfare on cities" (Mennel, 2008:105). Wounding, in this way, intimates an "'organic metaphor' which 'implies a vision of collective well-being that must be negotiated within an identifiable, bounded place'" (Schneider and Susser, in Mennel, 2008: 105). "Wounding" occurs, then, as "Warfare, like everything else, is being urbanised", to the point that one must appropriate a new term, "'urbicide'" the definition of which is "the deliberate denial, or killing, of the city" (Graham, in Mennel, 2008: 104).

Despite the search for new language to combat those forces that threaten it, the meaning of the city can be threatened in many ways.[15] Sayer, for instance, writes of the indescribability of the emotions felt by people in the wake of the terrorist strike on the World Trade Center in New York on September 11, 2001 (9/11):

> It was not an event of which we could make any sense. There were no
> explanations that seemed commensurate to its enormity. It was difficult
> to speak about it at all. It was not just that we did not have the right
> words to express what we felt. Any commitment to words felt like a
> betrayal, because the words always came freighted with associations,
> none of which seemed to belong in the same universe as what had
> occurred. Tragedy, atrocity, calamity, disaster – giving a name to the
> thing at all seemed already to diminish it, reducing it to an ordinary
> scale of thinkability. (Sayer, 2008: 12-13)

Of course, London has had its own tragedies, atrocities, calamities, disasters: fire and coercive acts of terrorism have altered the profile of the city throughout its history, including the 2005 bombings of both the underground and bus networks. Ackroyd, taking a historical view, discusses how, during the Blitz of World War II, the only viable language available to a society facing destruction is metaphor:

> Some compared London to a prehistoric animal, wounded and burned,
> which would disregard its assailants and keep moving massively
> onward; this was based on the intuition of London as representing some
> relentless and ancient force which could withstand any shock or injury.
> Yet other metaphors were in use – among them those of Jerusalem,

> Babylon and Pompeii – which lent a sense of precariousness and
> eventual doom to the city's plight. When in the first days of the Blitz
> Londoners saw the ranks of German bombers advancing without being
> hindered by anti-aircraft fire, there was an instinctive fear that they were
> witnessing the imminent destruction of their city. (2001: 737-738)

The extent of the damage caused by the Blitz can be seen in the image of St. Paul's from *Stage Fright*: a roofless building in the foreground; and an empty stretch of ground in front of the cathedral signifying the aftermath of war. The recourse to use metaphoric language to apprehend the enormity of the devastation, to give voice to the statistics ("Between September and November [1940] 30,000 bombs were dropped on the capital" (737)) is a useful indicator as to the power of the visceral: one must resort to analogy in order to come to terms with it. The untranslatability of the visceral into language necessitates its transference into common terms. (Indeed, the etymological roots of 'metaphor' are planted in the Ancient Greek word meaning 'transference' (See Lanham, 1991: 100).) London therefore becomes a body whose wounds can be felt by the entire populace. Such metaphor – evoking, of course, Barthes' *punctum* – enables a society to share a language with which to comprehend the terror.

Can Cronenberg's denial of London, the London-ness of London, be viewed as an act of terrorism? Barthes is lucid in defining terrorism's place in language: it has, he says, "aggressive characteristics one may or may not approve of, but it remains within the signifier: it manipulates language as a more or less ludic deployment of the signifier" (Barthes, 1985: 161-162). As Morris (2004) notes, "For Barthes, terrorism is defined by the incapacity of others to locate an origin or ultimate motivator for terrorist acts" (Morris, 2004: 409-410). Within this context, Cronenberg's refusal of London-ness is not so much a denial of the signifier but of its signified. This is the dangerous "undecidability" of the visceral sign, originating as it does from "a gap between the motivation and the form of the violence undertaken" (410) from which gestates the threat to ideology. Morris finds examples of this in the language of the United States' post-9/11 'National Security Strategy' which explains that "[t]he struggle against global terrorism is different from any other war in history. It will be fought on many fronts against a *particularly elusive* enemy over an extended period of time" (US Government, 2002, section III, in Morris, 2004: 410). The elusiveness

of Cronenberg's images equates the visceral sign with terrorism: the explosive moment of meaninglessness which threatens the ideologically constructed subject.

There are two points to consider here. The first is at the level of comprehension: by levelling the visceral sign as an act of terrorism, one admits one's ignorance as to its meaning; being particularly (and similarly) elusive, the visceral sign can be treated with what Barthes calls (in reference to certain critical responses to the implementation of existential and Marxist philosophies in art) "common sense" and "feeling". The critic, whose "blindness or dumbness" has been exalted "to a universal rule of perception", can confidently exclaim, "'I don't understand, therefore you are idiots.'" Yet in an inversion of this logic, and as Barthes informs the reader, "any reservation about culture means a terrorist position"; so in his response to a culture "not controlled by 'common sense' and 'feeling'", the critic's attempts "to reject from the world" any culture that does not "proclaim [...] the vanity of its ends and the limits of its power" he is condemning not only the visceral sign, but the ecology of the creative environment from which it emerges. Hence: the critic is responsible for attempting the denial of language; perpetrating, in other words, an act of which the terrorist himself is accused (Barthes, 2000 [1957]: 35).

The second point to consider about Cronenberg's terrorism is intent. As previously stated, the visceral emerges as a consequence of production, but is itself entirely neutral. Cronenberg most certainly planned to signify only enough of London to evoke something about London-ness; a tendency to be understood in the light of his desire to avoid the touristic in earlier films. Yet what could not have been predicted was the empty centre through which language becomes meaningless, the dissemination of signifiers without corresponding signifieds. This is not terror, in other words, but is a consequential challenge to ideology from outside language. It occurs, in other words, very much as a by-product of the director's intent to make a film in London which does not foreground the touristic view of the city. The visceral, then, emerges from certain conditions of filmmaking, regardless of yet connected to the aims of the filmmaker.

> She had always hated the streets of the city. She saw the faces
> streaming past her, the faces made alike by fear – fear as a common
> denominator, fear of themselves, fear of all and of one another, fear
> making them ready to pounce upon whatever was held sacred by any
> single one they met. She could not define the nature or the reason of
> that fear. But she had always felt its presence. She had kept herself
> clean and free in a single passion – to touch nothing. (Rayn, 1971: 243)

If Cronenberg decontextualises London's landmarks into empty signs, Cassavetes reappropriates them. Looking through his career as director, we see that actually two of his films have a London connection: not only *Husbands*, then, but also *Love Streams*, in which Sarah's visit to the city is explicated entirely through a conversation of mutual misunderstanding with a Cockney station-master, and a call to her estranged family from a red telephone box situated on what appears to be a Hollywood soundstage. *Husbands*, meanwhile, is filmed in real London locations as its protagonists leave their New York suburban lives as part of the process of 'coming to terms' with the death of a friend.

Love Streams is fond of soundstages: there is also a scene in an equally-minimalist, low-key Parisian setting with Sarah, luggage and a French porter (who of course speaks no English) viewed behind a chain-link fence; and a dream sequence, staged as an operetta, in which Sarah, Jack and Debbie sing the tragedy of familial unity and separation. These sets, however, have none of the ambiguity of Cronenberg's simultaneous refusal and denial of location. All three of the soundstages in *Love Streams* connote nothing more than theatricality, in both their staginess and (as Fried (1967; 2005) describes it) their spectacle;[16] they contain, in other words, too much potential meaning (the film is an adaptation of a stage play; the *mise-en-scene* conveys the perceived unreality of Sarah's outlook on love), and as such become merely interesting: they are overwrought sideshows to the kinetic drama in the rest of the film, but are not, in and of themselves, visceral. As Charity (2001) notes, "the film's poverty row backlot renditions of Sarah's trips to France and Britain arguably enhance the movie's eccentric charm" (188). They are, in other words, curiosities. *Husbands*, however, as with *Eastern Promises* both alienates and wounds the spectator through its ability to allow the visceral in to even the most recognisable of cities.

The films of Cassavetes, indeed, can be seen as intent on disrupting the central tenet of narrative cinema: to offer an analogue of 'reality in movement.' Kouvaros writes, for example, of another film, "Instead of giving us a series of defining actions, *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie* seems to focus on the interval between actions: the moment when an action is not yet or no longer present or else has happened too fast to be properly registered." He continues with an example from that film: "The elusive grins and expressions that pass across Cosmo's face seem to be the after-effects of events never witnessed directly but still capable of registering a complicity with the camera" (2004: 152). In concentrating on these arbitrary gestures, space too is deformed. The home within which much of the drama is centred in *A Woman Under the Influence*, for instance, becomes a warren of rooms that do not logically interconnect; and in *Love Streams* the concentration on the interval between actions is enhanced by their occurrence in interiors that exist between places.

Arguably, these liminal spaces that frequent (and are frequented by the characters of) Cassavetes' oeuvre can be viewed as what the anthropologist Marc Auge (1995) designates as the "non-place", one that, unlike the place, cannot be "defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity". Picking up the term non-place and applying it specifically to cinema, Peter Wollen explains the meaning of the three factors that distinguish places from non-places:

> Relational' space refers to a bounded space which is laid out
> symbolically, so that each region of the space (or position within it) has
> a symbolic relation to others. 'Historical' space refers to space which
> has stable and meaningful historic associations. Space 'concerned with
> identity' refers to space which is personalised, with which an individual
> feels a strong personal or social relationship. (Wollen, 2002:201)

According to Auge's specifications, as noted by Wollen, non-places are "meaningless way-stations through which we travel", such as "airport lounges, service stations, supermarkets, leisure parks, hotels, clinics, conference centres and auditoria." Wollen adds to this list the cinema lobby and auditorium, which is a non-place as it too is "saturated with signage and texts": "easy-listening music, a plethora of signage in the form of posters and trailers, directions which way to go, injunctions to keep the hall clean, and so on" (200). In this sense Cassavetes' earliest experiments in creating a cinema of non-places can be found in the New York locations of *Shadows,* particular with its scene set in a bus terminal; but more than

this – and this is crucial to the director's evolutionary dissolution of the urban environment – even a location typically characterised with the attributes of place (an apartment, or MoMA's sculpture garden) is invested with the qualities of the non-place. One startling example of this is Lelia's late night walk through the city: as Lelia slows outside a cinema, one could argue for her status as *flaneuse* who, via the interventions of a century that enables a switch in gender is synonymous with Baudelaire's original conception of the disinterested, male observer of the metropolitan crowd – the *flaneur*, one whose "passion and [...] profession is that of *espousing the crowd*. For the perfect stroller, for the passionate observer, it is an immense delight to make one's home among the masses, in the inconstant, in the fugitive and in the infinite" (Baudelaire, in Lloyd, 2002:154).

The masses, however, are irrelevant to Cassavetes' record of the city: the streets – traditionally places of movement, not way-stations within which one stops and waits – are dominated by signage, which draws the attention of the human population, Lelia included, who linger, dawdle, appearing to pass the time as if it were a non-place. An excess of signage creates its own version of Baudelaire's inconstant, fugitive and infinite in cinema, where the moving camera, and more crucially the edit, thwarts any attempt by the viewer to fully grasp, or read the image.

Spurred on by Auge's observations, Wollen's attempt at "looking more closely at the cinema and its use of space" comes up with "two quite different types" which are central to understanding how Cassavetes subverts space to create his own version of the non-place. Wollen:

> There is the space created by the production designer, which is essentially a static space, and there is the second space created by the cinematographer and editor, which is essentially a dynamic space, which moves us about within the static space of the set or the location. The first corresponds to the space of the architect [...]; the second corresponds to the space of the story-teller, with its manipulation of point-of-view and its fascination with movement and action. (Wollen, 2002: 202)

The static space of *Husbands*, of course, pre-exists the film. The two city locations – New York and London – are solidly present, but as already discussed with regards to Cronenberg's *Eastern Promises*, the immobility of buildings does not necessarily correspond to an immobility, or homogeneity of meaning. Cronenberg's film seeks

to defuse the meaning of the landmark, but Cassavetes strips away all New York-ness and London-ness from the *mise-en-scene*, creating just one (non-) place, encapsulated by a single designator, the urban. Thus, in terms of the dynamic space of the story-teller, the viewer is 'told' via the contiguity of plot the characters have left New York and are now in London, but the diegesis, outside the accents of certain secondary characters (such as the 'dates' the men pick up) are a series of interiors which could be set anywhere: a casino, a bar, a hotel room. The single exterior, which involves Archie's girl, Julie, attempting to get away from him, is filmed essentially as a sequence of shallow-focus medium shots and close ups. Even when the camera does pull back, the clarity of the background is further diminished by driving rain. The rain, furthermore, is in fact a special effect – revealed in a BBC documentary on the film (*The Making of Husbands*) – echoing the staged technique used in Hollywood productions such as *Singin' in the Rain*, for sure, but also prefiguring Cassavetes' own insistence on engineering the original stage version of *Love Streams* so that the downpour could occur on-stage (see Leary, 2007). The simultaneity of the artificial amid real locations of course evokes the persistence of the visceral in the guise of the special effect as mentioned previously (of the stage version of *Love Streams* one critic writes, "That the actors managed to remain dry coming in from the storm tells you something about the curious priorities at work here" (Drake, 1981: 1)); more important, however, is Cassavetes' willingness to obscure London using the weather with which the capital is frequently, and historically associated:

> Now in contiguous drops the flood comes down
> Threatening with deluge this devoted Town.
> (Swift, 1710, in Ackroyd, 2001: 425)

In *Husbands* the contiguity of London-ness is expressed, as is Jonathan Swift's couplet, only through rain, which permeates every exterior shot in the movie.

In this sense *Husbands* creates the non-place through a greater manipulation of the location *mise-en-scene* than via the dynamism of the camera or editing. Charity notes that "the long lenses and mostly static camera (with occasional pans) create an observational, chanced-upon aesthetic that's the visual correlative of the actors' repetitions, hesitations and cross-talk" (Charity, 2001: 86). The interiors too, do more to destabilise the viewer's perception of space than through the simple removal

of geographic signifiers within the *mise-en-scene*. There is, in the film, for example, a six minute shot in which the camera's only movement is a pan that intermittently follows the actions of the bodies onscreen. In this scene there are six bodies: those of Gus and his date, Mary; Archie's and Julie's; and Harry's and Pearl's. The movements of bodies within the *mise-en-scene* of a bedroom are however distorted through the placement of mirrors at the rear. These mirrors are on the outside of wardrobe doors, which perhaps connote a certain procedural coldness to the room that signals this is a hotel; but more to the point their peculiar angles disturb the transparency of a narrative sequence in which three men clumsily attempt to seduce three women.

Naturally, there are practical considerations: the doors are opened so as not to reveal the presence of the film crew. This explanation is plausible excepting the fact that the shot could have been filmed from a different angle. More importantly, however, at the end of the film, a one minute long-shot of Archie and Gus clearly reveals the boom microphone at the top of the screen. The shot does not begin this way, the microphone descending into view, presumably to pick up the dialogue clearly. The camera at first attempts to reframe the shot as if to block out the microphone, but then settles, even though there is at least a foot of leeway within which it could tilt downwards while still keeping the actors in frame. The intent here is less on creating a fictive space than in destabilising it. The same conclusion can be made about the scene in the hotel bedroom.

Bodies move in the room, and the angled mirrors reflect those other bodies that are not visible directly in the *mise-en-scene*. In particular, as they dress alike, Archie, Harry and Gus become confused as partial images of figures in black suits pitch into frames contained within the screen. The dynamism, then, is not of narrative, but of what Branigan (2006) in his discussion of the frame in film theory calls the "container schema, with its dynamism of both 'containing' and 'breaking free'" (Branigan, 2006: 124), whereby the former points to "convention (surface)" and the latter to "subterfuge (depth)" (125). Branigan is being essentially metaphorical in his depiction of the frame, but his insights reveal the impenetrability of Cassavetes' image in its interplay of surfaces and depths, the obliquely angled mirrors a subterfuge to the convention of the observational aesthetic. It is a bombardment of

signs, not signage, a depiction of a space capable of dislocating the human body into signifieds whose signifieds are in constant flux.

FREEDOM

Cassavetes is creating a dismembered space out of existing spaces, and he is using the human body to deliver its message. In this sense, he is using cinema in a way that urban geography cannot decipher. For this reason, Cassavetes' aesthetic shares many more of the characteristics of the twenty-first century *traceur* than of the *flaneur* who emerged over a hundred years earlier from modernity's first flowering.

The *traceur* is the human practitioner of parkour, an activity "variously described as freerunning, a type of play, the art of displacement, the discipline of moving from A to B as fast and efficiently as possible, and even as a way of life" (Saville, 2008: 892). Parkour is essentially an 'extreme sport' involving individuals who navigate the highest points of a city's architecture on foot and at speed. The *traceur* leaps between buildings, using the urban environment's contextual details such as cornices and moldings as hand- and foot-holds from which to enact and continue his improvised progress. The *flaneur*'s occupation is also a way of life, but, as Walter Benjamin notes, is concerned more with the construction of an understanding of the crowd, than in subjectifying the objectivity of movements in space: "Empathy is the nature of the intoxication to which the *flâneur* abandons himself in the crowd. He [. . .] enjoys the incomparable privilege of being himself and someone else as he sees fit. Like a roving soul in search of a body, he enters another person whenever he wishes" (Benjamin, 1993 [1938]: 55). Comprehended in this way the emergence of the *traceur* can be conceived as a return to a condition of humanity which pre-dates the *flaneur*, reversing the evolutionary process as revealed by Spengler, quoted by Benjamin: "Man as civilised being, as *intellectual nomad*, is again wholly microcosmic, wholly homeless, as free intellectually as hunter and herdsman were free sensually" (Spengler, 1928, in Benjamin, 2002 [c. 1927-1940]: 806).

The *flaneur* is intellectual; the *traceur* is sensual, one whose relationship to space is felt viscerally. Stephen John Saville's experience as parkour practitioner and theorist discovers how subject and object interact in new ways: "As it playfully tests, the body is closely intertwined with places as a sensuous moving subject". The *traceur*'s

congruence with Cassavetes' filmmaking is in his willingness to relate to the inherent newness of familiar objects; objects that can be "inspected, tested, felt, rolled over, pushed off of, jumped on, vaulted over" (Saville, 2008: 900); in other words, re-discovered. In a phrase that simultaneously disjoints the *traceur* from the intellectual disinterestedness of the *flaneur* and manages to tap into the visceral force that works behind Cassavetes' *oeuvre*, Saville writes that "parkour befuddles any attempt to describe a rational, economic or disembodied decision-making actor" (898). Evidence of this can be found in a comparison between Saville's attempt to articulate the experience of parkour and Kouvaros recounting a scene in *Husbands*. Saville:

> He has just made the jump. It is a strange realisation; a 'what am I doing here' moment, when my stomach speaks up telling me this must be a madness-inspired misadventure. What I have seen looks impossible; it is genuinely shocking, it strikes at me and racks the body all over. In an instant that person and that place take on a horrifying tint, a wrapping of coarse fear that grates away any bravado or rosy talk about what was planned or the risks involved [...] And now it is my turn. The distance shrieks at me, shouts mockingly. Two-facedly it beckons me to the edge, seduces me onward, only to smack back. Eyes water, visual inputs begin to confound my other senses, just how far is it? Can my legs, arms and torso feel a jump of this distance as a possibility? Uncertainty twitches in muscles. The harmony between kinaesthetic and visual experience begins to falter, instead I am made whole precariously, like overly elastic threads holding my 'seeing' and 'feeling' together. Can I trust their communication? This will literally be a leap of faith, a moment that takes fear, hope and uncertainty so close that they blur into each other, even as my everyday senses seem to be coming apart. (903-904)

On Cassavetes' film, meanwhile, Kouvaros focuses on an interior in which Archie, Harry and Gus preside over a singing contest among the other residents of a bar:

> Cassavetes' lighting of the barroom illuminates the faces of the actors but little else, turning the room into a makeshift stage. The three friends set themselves up as judges, commenting among themselves on the singing and laughing. Throughout the scene, the faces and bodies of the characters are often obscured or fragmented. When we hear one of the friends talking, we might not be able to see him because his face is covered by a silhouetted body in the foreground. As the men consume beer after beer and become more and more animated and unpredictable in their responses to the singing contestants, we ask ourselves, How much longer can this go on? The question is not simply facetious, driven by exasperation, but is a result of the film's expansion and charging of performative time. (Kouvaros, 2004: 181-182)

In each instance the author endeavours to suggest the physical present-ness of the experience with the feelings it engenders – the 'kinaesthetic and visual' in Saville; the 'obscured and fragmented' bodies and faces in Kouvaros – and synthesise them with the feelings they engender: 'fear, hope and uncertainty' in one; the testing of limits ('How much longer can this go on?') in the other. This is a return to Barthes' awareness of other limits, of the limits of language when it seeks to investigate experience:

> It would seem that we are condemned for some time yet always to speak *excessively* about reality. This is probably because ideologism and its opposite are types of behaviour which are still magical, terrorised, blinded and fascinated by the split in the social world. And yet, this is what we must seek: a reconciliation between reality and men, between description and explanation, between object and knowledge. (Barthes, 2000 [1957]: 159)

Reality in Saville and Kouvaros is the visceral, which resists interpretation through language yet, in the attempt to comprehend it, is spoken of excessively. This is because

> [b]efore a linguistic understanding has a chance to take shape we are already feeling our environment through our eyes, as well as through our more proximate attuned sensory organs. In this way solidity, texture, surface and depth can all be felt at a distance. Spatial forms have a haptic presence, and can 'touch' you long before you have come close enough to lay hands on the brick, grass, wall, rail or whatever. (Saville, 2008: 904)

Cassavetes' figuration of everyday objects (we might even call it a reconfiguration[17]) – including the human body and face viewed as segments broken up by mirrors or other human bodies, foregrounded but also viewed only partially – invests them with what Jean-Louis Comolli calls, in reference to Cassavetes, "accumulation", whereby the film "is never a moment of repetition or reconstruction of 'reality.' Nor is it quite that of a selection inside a pre-filmic reality (as the re-production and elaboration of the script is in re-presentational cinema)" (Comolli, 1969: 243). The body of the screened image becomes, then, an accumulation; which in the relationship between parkour and cinema, can be understood as a combinatory of memory and presence that precludes the necessity of touch: "It is the past that comes at the body from the environment. A fence or wall can be 'felt' before the hand makes contact; rather the fence is involuntarily remembered" (Saville, 2008: 904).

For the *traceur* the bond between memory and space is in overcoming the body's predilection to avoid pain and fear: "Fear can become a familiar link to space, a riddle to solve. In parkour the answer is not to dispense with fear but is found in process, trying, testing, working out, and becoming fluid" (908). In the films of Cassavetes, of course, one's engagement is not with pain or fear, yet neither are the 'riddles of space' in *Husbands* et al a contract the viewer is always likely to accept or want. The response – 'How much longer can this go on?' and its variations – is a bodily response to the fluidity of the aesthetic and the apparent ease with which, in transforming a space into a non-place, Cassavetes achieves a total transformation of the familiar domestic environment into something incomprehensible, a "de-socialising abolition of place" (Wollen, 2002: 213) which language cannot penetrate: an object, in other words, without knowledge.

DIVISION

Cassavetes and Cronenberg deny the historical significance of cities. This is, however, not to say that the visceral as it appears in each director's depiction of space is ahistorical; rather it plays with ideas of what cinema can do with history (and vice versa), as in the example of Cassavetes' earlier film, *Shadows* and Hitchcock's *Stage Fright* and *The Birds*.

This chapter has dealt with the ways in which Cassavetes and Cronenberg's location shoots undermine the meaning of the location itself. In keeping with the idea of 'lists' and 'emptiness' that characterises their cinemas, the examples chosen here demonstrate these aspects as specifically unhinging ideological assumptions about what cities 'are' or 'should be' as recorded on film. Cassavetes' interiors, and his ability to obscure his few exteriors with special effects such as rain, deny the viewer the pleasure of seeing the city as a tourist site. It becomes merely another anonymous, impenetrable venue for the expansion of scenes that do little and go nowhere. Cronenberg's choices in camera set ups to show heritage London as a frighteningly inconsequential and diminishing detail, reveal a sense of how certain aspects of his films more generally resist semiological analysis. These may not be wilful acts of terrorism, but in being able to negate the city's power of speech,

Cassavetes and Cronenberg obstruct the historical, social and touristic meanings otherwise granted to the landmark capital.

Here, then, we can return to the two contemporary examples cited at the beginning of this chapter: the student demonstration and the Shard. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, these are not strictly examples of the visceral, but in the eyes of ideology, their reappraisal of the city in terms other than those that champion the city's heroic status become reframed as agents of chaos: events that disavow the meanings attributed by history and culture to the city. Through the ideological reaction to these events, we can see how the visceral may be unwelcome, but may also become a useful scapegoat (or, indeed, as Cubitt and Barthes would have it, a useful alibi) in lieu of a proper appreciation of the realities of what the urban space 'is' and 'does.'

However, as discussed here, the *truly* visceral films of Cassavetes and Cronenberg do demonstrate why this need to resist ideology is so important. Resisting the hegemony of narrative and of spectacle, the visceral offers a reminder that the cultural artefact is not always comprehensible, and that ideology is speechless in its thrall. Language, then, does what it can, but cannot possibly account for every image as it appears and disappears before us, presented in "the wakening of intractable reality" (Barthes, 1981: 119).

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[1] In a fascinating piece on "The monument", Henri Lefebvre writes, "The codifying approach of semiology, which seeks to classify representations, impressions and evocations [...] is quite unable to cover all facets of the monumental. Indeed, it does not even come close, for it is the residual, the irreducible – whatever cannot be classified or codified according to categories devised subsequent to production – which is, here as always, the most precious and the most essential, the diamond at the bottom of the melting-pot" (1998: 139). These words access what is meant by and defined as the visceral – how language cannot define every aspect of the things – movies, monuments – we see. Neil Leach, editing the volume in which this Lefebvre quote appears, implies this attack on the uselessness of classifications as somehow contradictory to Barthes' categories in *S/Z*. However, and as I hope is made plain through my readings here, through terms such as 'writerly,' 'the third meaning,' *punctum* and so forth, Barthes, too, notes the inability of semiology "to cover all facets" of certain artefacts of culture

[2] It is also worth noting that Cronenberg has a greater tendency to work with built sets in his films. Interzone in the adaptation of William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*, is based on the author's memories of Tangier, yet is entirely fabricated for the film on a Toronto soundstage. The "labyrinths" of *eXistenZ* – echoing the "rhetorical" Chinese box formulation of the narrative, are also built specifically for the film (Mathijs, 2008: 210)

³ Cronenberg's anonymity of place, discussed in this chapter, may itself be symptomatic of his Toronto background. Toronto, after all, is often an anonymous presence in films. The city's CN Tower is a backdrop in *Videodrome*, but we also find in Ang Lee's *Hulk* (2003) the University of Toronto campus doubling for Virginia's Culver University; in *Kal Ho Naa Ho* (Nikhil Advani, 2003) Toronto is cast as New York; and in *Cinderella Man*, Toronto becomes New York in 1930s. The city's Gooderham building is known as the Flatiron building; and the Toronto Dominion Centre by the architect Mies van der Rohe is a skyscraper used often in US productions. Of this tendency in Cronenberg's work, it is worth reflecting on his decision to translate the London urban locations of Ballard's *Crash* to Toronto in his filmed version of the novel. The result, according to Sinclair (2009) evokes as much a sense of the British capital as it does 'Canadian-ness'

⁴ We might say the sequence troubled me so much I had to see it for myself, placing myself in the position of Cronenberg's camera, but also on other bridges in the city, to realise my understanding of Cronenberg's choices absolutely access what I am discussing here: the disavowal of meaning

⁵ The term "prodigious absence" has occurred elsewhere in academia, outside of the scope of this thesis. Kofman, for example uses the term in a review of Hollier's *Politique de la Prose* (1984)

⁶ Lowenstein's term, "Blasting open the continuum of history" (2005: 12, *passim*) also suggests a way of disrupting ideologically-formulated visions of the city. Using the horror film as a focal point, he discusses how the genre film allegorises the troubles associated with how a nation views itself. The idea of continuum here offers an interesting parallel to how the visceral also 'blasts open' narrative cause-and-effect, the continuum of sense offered by films. Cities, nations and films, therefore, operate along a mythical, syntagmatic path that demands to be questioned, and undone

⁷ London wash houses: here may well be an homage to Jerzy Skolimowski's *Deep End* (1970) which is set in a public baths, and also has a bloody denouement inside a grim, sleazy setting setting of tiles and water. Skolimowski also stars in Cronenberg's film

⁸ Both local residents and websites (e.g. <http://www.islington.gov.uk/Council/CouncilNews/Consultation/consultationresults/irb.asp> (Accessed 24 March 2011)) refer to the location featured in *Eastern Promises* as the Ironmonger Row baths. The title above the door, then, connotes a London-ness that is not experienced locally. Similarly, there is no Trafalgar Hospital as featured in the film. The location is in fact the Middlesex Hospital. Cronenberg, here, is evoking an apparently verifiable London-ness that does not exist in the real world

⁹ The word is psychogeography, and is often associated with a particular genre of London fiction and non-fiction, as in the work of Iain Sinclair, whose *Lights Out for the Territory* is subtitled "9 excursions into the secret history of London". It is less a travelogue than an attempt, in the author's words "to vandalise dormant energies by an act of ambulant signmaking." In one chapter Sinclair recounts his "near-arbitrary route" from "Hackney to Greenwich Hill, and back along the River Lea to Chingford Mount"; a route described as "a crude **V**" "cut" "into the sprawl of the city". In Sinclair's eyes London is a city of delirium, sparsely populated, containing only the remnants of civilisation: it is a city of "Urban graffiti"; a city impacted on by other cities, itinerant memories that nonetheless stay "true to genre"; a city forced to remember, as Sinclair remembers, fictions such as *Night and the City* and *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie*, where the old stalking grounds of local gangsters – most notoriously the Kray brothers – are preoccupied by long, wet days: the "soft" weather of Dublin, come "In off the sea" (Sinclair, 2003 [1997], pp1, 24). Here is also the 're-mapping' of city space we might find in Joyce's Dublin as reconfigured in *Ulysses* (1922): "in a way there is no longer a city, there is only a man walking through it" (Bridge and Watson, 2010: 97). Linking Cronenberg's ability

to dissolve the cityscape in such a way as employed by Joyce betrays, perhaps, a continuing modernist view of the filmmaker

[10] Iconicity is something an international audience may search for in such a film. Cannon Street Station may well be a 'local' landmark, but what is most evident (at the 'focal centre' of the screen) is water: the wide-angle composition prioritising it and the grey sky

[11] Indeed, in Woody Allen's *You Will Meet a Tall, Dark Stranger* (2010) the opening, establishing shot of a London street also has no recognisable 'London-ness.' The buses, here too, are fairly anonymous vehicles, even when filmed as part of a long shot. Allen's solution is to have a black taxi turn the corner at the moment of the film's starting, which transports one of the main characters to a door on this otherwise 'un-Londonlike' street

[12] I risk an excessive spatial metaphor among the Appendices that conclude this volume: a visual recreation of how the visceral resists both narrative and spectacle

[13] For 'luminescent separateness' we might transpose the term "coolness," a word analysed at length by Mathijs (2008) with regard to Cronenberg's films (in particular *Crash*). Here cool means both a hedonistic and ironic detachment from moral judgments (192), but also (and more applicable here) a "cold and clinical" approach to character relationships that is not seen as necessarily antithetical to the suggested "depravity" of the film as stated by critics writing in the British press (189). Cool, then, is more accurately equated (in the case of Cronenberg's characters in general) with 'cold,' which in the case of the image of Anna driving across the bridge, only further separates her from the 'reality' of London

[14] We need to mention here as well the prevalence of machines in Cronenberg's films, also noted by Lowenstein (2005: 217) and Mathijs (2008: 53-71). Mathijs' analysis of Cronenberg's *Fast Company* (1979), a fictional film about the life of characters on the stock car racing circuit, finds in it a continuity of emphasis on the car and the motorcycle that predominates Cronenberg's *oeuvre* from *Shivers* to *Eastern Promises* (indeed a montage of stills in Mathijs' book (70) illustrates this point beautifully). Cronenberg's love of the speed of the road vehicle is also mentioned in his commentary on the DVD of *The Fly*, in which the telepod used by Brundle in the film is revealed to be modelled on a component of a Ducati motorcycle

[15] There are, indeed, many ways the identity of the city can be threatened, but also many ways in which the ideological apparatus can fight back. On the film *We Were Soldiers* (Randall Wallace, 2002) Lowenstein describes the fate of the "ostentatiously" named Japanese American soldier Jimmy Nakayama fighting with the American troops in Vietnam who is scalded by napalm. However, in the way the film is coded, Jimmy's wounds "transport him" from "visual evidence of American brutality and racism" to "the racially unmarked realm of upstanding 'Americanness.'" Lowenstein sees this as evidence of American patriotism that is effectively "sealing the cracks". Rather than finding "disturbing continuities between Hiroshima, Vietnam and Afghanistan" he suggests the relationship between these events occurs only at the level of a tale of "American heroism" (2005: 180, 181). There are echoes here of Barthes' example of myth discussed in relation to the black soldier saluting the French *tricolor* on the cover of *Paris Match* (2000 [1957]: 116, *passim.*). Here, too, an ideologically-inflected image is weighed with an enforced, additional meaning: "The French Empire? It's just a fact: look at this good Negro who salutes like one of our own boys" (124)

[16] See the previous chapter, "Effects," for a summary of Fried's thoughts oh theatricality

[17] There is an example of this reconfiguration in Cronenberg's work, too. *eXistenZ* features organic game controllers carried around by the central character in a bag that has the structure of a snow boot. In the documentary on the production designer Carol Spier (included on the DVD) the design team describe how, after reading the snow boot description of the bag in Cronenberg's script, endeavoured to interpret these words as a physical object. That the resultant image is of an *actual* snow boot transformed into a bag, is an echo of one character's observation in the film: "Everything used to be something else"

CONCLUSION

As is clear from many studies of their works, John Cassavetes and David Cronenberg's films are incompatible in many ways. Cassavetes' makeshift and itinerant methods in both camera placement and editing, coupled with his themes of urban and suburban dissatisfaction contrast strongly with Cronenberg's genre pieces, extreme images and much more measured approach to filmmaking. While these two directors may be seen to remain incomparable when their films are viewed side by side as examples of, for example, genre or style, as agents of the visceral (a capacity of film to escape meaning), they have much more in common.

These commonalities arise from each director's acquiescence to exposing a degree of arbitrariness in their films than films (particularly in the Hollywood tradition) are habitually permitted to show. Made under the scrutiny of teams of personnel comprised of directors, cinematographers, special effects technicians, editors, and so on, films are able to be constructed in precisely the ways their creators (and budgets) allow. Cassavetes and Cronenberg, despite these very same processes occurring on their sets, through filming and into post-production, are willing to let certain inconsistencies, errors and unmotivated sections slip into the final version that add another dimension. This dimension serves neither the plot, nor does it simply thrill the viewer. Yet it is there, and it returns, its meaning unresolved on every viewing. The invasive boom in *Husbands* (discussed in the previous chapter) is resolutely and stubbornly present, even while it may be viewed as an accident of composition, absolutely demands its space in the *mise-en-scene*. The special make-up effects in *Videodrome*, analysed in the chapter "Effects," describe a gruesome transition of a character's hand fusing with the gun it is holding, but the aesthetic description of this transition also foregrounds the machinery of how this effect is achieved. The ancillary characteristics of both these examples highlight how the visceral, through Cassavetes and Cronenberg, encourages non-narrative, non-spectacular elements into the aesthetic of film.

In this way, Cronenberg's aim in his films, "to show the unshowable, to speak the unspeakable" (Rodley, 1997: 43), takes on another component with regards to the visceral. Certainly, as exercises in genre (the horror film, the thriller or crime

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drama) they do not flinch from showing the grisly details of a sequence. However, as applied to both his *and* Cassavetes' *oeuvres*, the terms 'unshowable' and 'unspeakable' may also refer to this part of their films that *cannot* be shown or spoken of, because the viewer does not have the capacity to register or express exactly what these parts mean, or why they are there.

This capacity for Cassavetes and Cronenberg to accept the intrusion of facets that transgress the meaning of their films certainly unites the filmmakers. It is also worth remembering, of course, these facets emerge in very different films, and it is in Cassavetes and Cronenberg's dissimilarities that the visceral can be discussed. If we were to only talk about the fusion of hand and gun in *Videodrome*, or the boom microphone that imposes on the scene in *Husbands*, we would be tempted to consider each as in the light of, say, genre criticism or experimental cinema, respectively. Discussed, rather, with an awareness of the other director's films, the films are permitted to be viewed differently, outside the trappings of such agendas. They are, then, freed to be argued as constructs of the film first of all, before other meanings are bestowed upon them, *if* they can be bestowed upon them. It is this refusal for an element to 'mean' that has been the focus of this thesis.

Hence the chapters here have suggested ways in which certain elements in Cassavetes and Cronenberg's films possess what Barthes calls, "a theoretical individuality", which may be interpreted to mean a certain condition of the image that escapes categorisation. They are theoretical, of course, because there is a possibility of misreading, of considering whether this perceived denial of meaning is, indeed, "justified" (1977: 53). It is here, however, that Barthes becomes invaluable, and it is the reason why his own 'theoretical individuality' has permeated the analyses here. In this way, Barthesian terms – led perhaps by his concepts of a 'third meaning' and particularly 'the *punctum*' – have revealed that not only is the ability of an element to escape meaning a possibility, but is also something worth examining much closer. The uses and limits of semiology – a method of studying how language in its broadest sense works – has been a consistent touchstone in Barthes' writings. Following his cue, the ways in which semiology is limited in capturing the full meaning of a text has become integral to 'justifying' the examples of the visceral discussed throughout the chapters here. Thus the visceral, after such

terms as Barthes' third meaning and *punctum* – is seen as an unobtainable, ungraspable, unreadable aspect of an image that may be seen as intelligible in other ways.[1]

The importance of the prominent characteristics of Cassavetes and Cronenberg's cinemas cannot be overstated as essential factors in determining where to find the visceral. After all, outside of the specific application of the term used here, 'visceral' may also be understood as suggesting more general traits in each director's *oeuvre*. Hence the horrific, explicit and bizarre aspects of Cronenberg's films encourage a deeper analysis (or what Barthes calls "interrogation" (1977: 53)) of how the separate elements work together. Then, at the moment the aesthetic *still* seems to be withholding something, the other meaning of visceral – beginning as it does with Barthes' definition of the "visceral sign" as a hidden aspect of the image (2000 [1957]: 23) – becomes the only method by which to perceive these excessive elements. The same method, of course, is applied to Cassavetes' films, loaded as they are with incomplete, fragmented and disproportionately prioritised events that nonetheless also seem to be withholding something. This 'something' is perceived as a crucial, but inexplicable facet.

The examples mentioned throughout this thesis have presented these facets as evident in specific parts of the films – to the examples already mentioned in this chapter we might add the long-shot of boy, man and car in *Love Streams* or the bloody stump that is neither hand nor grenade in *Videodrome* – but could it be that the visceral may well be something even less graspable within the context of an entire text? Following Barthes, and indeed Thompson's discussions of "excess" in narrative film (2004), the focus here has been on discovering individual moments in certain works that contain an additional, unfathomable quality. However, is it possible that what allows 'the visceral' to thrive on subsequent viewings of a particular film is that it exists somewhere within a medium that is defined by its ability to suggest movement, and to constantly and consistently change images over time?[2] To do so of course, would probably entail a rigorous, moment-by-moment interrogation of every shot in just one film, possibly along the lines of Durgnat's (2002) book-length analysis of Hitchcock's *Psycho*. However, as discussed earlier in relation to Barthes' warning from *Mythologies* (2000 [1959]: 159), such a

technique of *over*-analysis may well destroy the essence of, in this case, what the visceral actually 'is.'

Nonetheless in the structure of this thesis – searching as it does for the visceral within the confines of two cinemas not habitually discussed together – there is a sense that the hidden aspects of the image have a peripatetic function across time, not just space. The descriptions and investigations into consecutive shots from *Shadows* and *Videodrome*, in particular, suggest that the visceral is present *somewhere* in these sequences, but cannot be located to a specific moment in time. Furthermore, the discussion of the visceral in a non-horrific moment in *Eastern Promises* allows a reading of an entire body of work – not just the gruesome parts – as symptomatic of a more widespread ability to potentially disrupt meaning.[3]

In examining, or as Barthes describes it, interrogating Cassavetes and Cronenberg's cinemas in this way (1977) the thesis has intended to add to the grammar of cinema through a theory of the visceral. At this point it is worth mentioning the first of the appendices included as supplementary material to this thesis. Appendix A offers a diagrammatic representation of a theory of the visceral. In particular it represents the forces of comprehension the visceral pulls against. These forces, represented by the horizontal left-to-right line of narrative and the perpendicular arrow of spectacle that emanates from it towards the viewer, offer certain views of film as a medium that is entirely intelligible. We might say, then, that the left to right arrow represents such terms as *syntagm*, *diachrony*, *metonymy*, *readerly* and so forth as mentioned in the chapters here. The perpendicular arrow that points towards the viewer, meanwhile, represents terms such as *special effect*, *theatre*, *shock*, *thrill* and so on. Most importantly, illustrating spectacle as an attachment to narrative that is projected towards the viewer also serves to represent the concept of visceral cinema as an immediacy of affect activated by a locatable, factual component in the diegesis.

The visceral as shown in the same model is figured as working in the opposite direction to these forces. It moves *away* from the efforts of the viewer to comprehend it, so corresponds with ideas such as *the third meaning* or *excess*. These concepts describe the supplanting of meaning through superfluity and successful dislocation of the image's full purpose. However, in being named *the visceral*, the figure does not simply work in opposition to sense, meaning and narrative on one

hand, and the excitement of spectacle on the other. The term instead describes a condition of the image that is as *immediately* noticeable to the viewer as any visceral effect, but because it cannot be precisely located in narrative or spectacular terms, only serves to upset the viewer in ways that cannot be satisfactorily articulated. The visceral, then, is found to have correspondence with Barthes' terms such as *writerly*, *filmic* and, in particular the *punctum*. These terms express a direct engagement between viewer and text that is not confined to readings based on narrative or meaning. In short, as the model in Appendix A suggests, the visceral disturbs because it disrupts meaning, but the viewer cannot in either case discover how or where exactly this disruption occurs.

Of course, there are many more ways films can disrupt meaning. Little has been discussed here about the place of the soundtrack in Cassavetes and Cronenberg's films, which again signals marked differences between their aesthetics. Cronenberg's use of long-term collaborator Howard Shore's music, for example, can be read as an example of "emotional signalling" at moments of crisis, such as the rising orchestral *fortissimo* that signals dramatic fade-outs in *The Fly* (see Deutsch, 2010: 55). Cassavetes, while largely dispensing with musical soundtracks, does nonetheless incorporate jazz tracks into his films[4] with the same apparent arbitrariness as the other aspects of his technique. In such an environment, the presence of the music can question the diegesis, as in *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie*, which features the central character, Cosmo, dancing in a bar. On the soundtrack Jack Sheldon sings, "I'm Almost in Love with You," which drowns out the sounds from the bar, but is also out of tempo with Cosmo's movements. The song we hear is not absolutely resolved as either an entirely diegetic, or non-diegetic element on the soundtrack.[5] Such questions about the place of music as an aspect of the visceral are certainly possible areas for further study.[6]

So, as hinted with regard to music, other elements of the film can be the focus of research into how the visceral disturbs meaning. These meanings, as mentioned throughout this thesis, are seen as being bound to certain, ostensibly integral dimensions of the fiction film – narrative, spectacle – but it is also possible to examine how the visceral relates to far more specific aspects of cinema. The chapter "Cities" has certainly begun this process, but what of the visceral's relationship to,

for example, genre? Both the films of Cassavetes and Cronenberg do, for sure, have some allegiance to genre, even as they reject some of its trappings. Yet we might argue that just as the visceral needs the existence of narrative in order to disturb it, genre's establishment of formal and ideological systems is also ripe for similar disruption. In so doing, does the presence of the visceral have a correlation with the indeterminate shape of cult cinema, a genre that appears to have no single, fixed method by which its meanings are constructed?[7] If this is the case, does it allow a reading of the much wider genre of cult cinema as, in the words of Mathijs and Sexton (2011) "serious, aesthetic productions" rather than as "low cultural" artefacts (95)?[8] This is one further way the visceral might be a useful way of interrogating particular types of film in new ways, effectively casting them in a new light. The same method could be applied to other, marginal cultural artefacts such as the video game, as already suggested in the chapter, "Effects," here.

In putting forward a theory of the visceral, the thesis has promoted the experience of film ahead of the inadequacies of language in grasping particular aspects of that experience. Through a transparently Barthesian lens, the main focus has been the irreplaceable characteristics of the image itself – its inability, in other words, to be replaced by description, intent or meaning. However, there are ways in which the visceral can be discussed in relation to its affect on the viewer. Certainly, this has been touched on here, for example in relation to the visceral being likened to an act of terror perpetrated on language. Yet it can also be explored through Barthes' thoughts on *jouissance*, which conceives of a condition of suffering that lies beyond the threshold of enjoyment, which may well describe the affect of the indescribable image of the visceral on the viewer (1975; also Lacan, 2000).

Perhaps this exploration of affect as applied to the visceral could be explored through the image of the body as it appears onscreen. In both Cassavetes and Cronenberg's cinemas, this offers a potentially fascinating area for further research, which links their films in surprising ways. Both directors have employed people for whom narrative cinema is not an environment in which they are familiar. Cassavetes, in particular, consistently uses non-actors in key roles,[9] but in *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie* features "professional strippers" as dancers in the strip club where much of the film is based (Charity, 2001: 146). Here, interesting

questions are suggested by the inclusion of nudity in the work of a director who ostensibly disapproves of its inclusion in his films.[10] For sure, placed next to Cronenberg's more prevalent images of the naked form in his films, it offers an interesting comparison. However, the potential of this enquiry becomes most useful in a study of the visceral when we consider the performances in *Chinese Bookie* next to the performance of Marilyn Chambers in *Rabid*. Chambers, at the time of *Rabid*, was famous for starring in the porn movie *Behind the Green Door* (Mitchell Brothers, 1972). Such a comparison may, taking the Barthesian perspective into account, explore ideas of what narrative cinema (and the director of narrative cinema) feels must be hidden from the viewer that is otherwise entirely explicit in the highly sexualised contexts in which these women are 'notoriously' associated. Such an interrogation of the sexualised or pornographic body in a narrative circumstance will undoubtedly further investigate the relationship between the visceral, affect and Barthes' *jouissance*.[11]

From this, perhaps the most exciting prospect for a study of the visceral will be how it is perceived within the field of ethics. As a force that is seen to work in opposition to the constructedness of language, it might be reasonable to suggest that the visceral is either immoral, or at best amoral when viewed in ideological terms. However it is worth remembering that in the writings of Levinas, particularly as reinvigorated in cinematic terms by Girgus (2010) morality, in a manner similar to the visceral, is seen to exist outside cultural interpretations of the world. In these texts ethics is conceived as existing before an aesthetic appreciation of our surroundings, so that our understanding of how to treat others is a prerequisite of what makes us human. In the Levinasian universe, then, ethics precedes knowledge, offering curious parallels between the transcendent characteristics of morality and the visceral, which both rely on an aversion to being apprehended by language. This parallel offers intriguing repercussions in describing the visceral and its affects in ethical terms, not least in questioning whether this implies the visceral as a facet of the image that contains either a moral purpose or its opposite.[12]

These are tentative and hardly conclusive ways in which studies of the visceral may be furthered in particular avenues of research. Where the idea behind the visceral originates, however, is in a desire to interrogate the locus of interaction between

viewer and the fiction film.[13] In proposing the visceral as one such locus, this thesis suggests there remains in film an amalgamation of sights and sounds that, no matter how often we view them, confound our sense of the logic and logistics of narrative cinema's overarching purpose. To return to Barthes' original conception of the visceral sign in *Mythologies*, this challenge to our knowledge of what film does and should do is renewed every time we watch. Through this renewal, and however often we see it in action, the visceral and its affects cannot be translated beyond the palpable life of the images screened in front of us. It remains that the only way to experience the visceral is to watch, and to listen, even as our acknowledgement of its existence compels us to do otherwise.

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[1] A further example from Barthes, in his analysis of the stills from *Ivan the Terrible, Part 1* will reinforce this point. Examining the courtiers who are pouring gold over "the young czar's head" (1977: 52) Barthes agrees that we might conclude "They are simply doing their job as courtiers" (53) but that alone does not account for the entire image, "does not leave me fully satisfied; something in the faces exceeds psychology, anecdote, function, exceeds meaning [...]" (54)

[2] James Ferman, the secretary of the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) from the mid-1970s, was faced with the task of editing Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. In agreeing it needed to be cut, he found that however he chose to do so, the film retained its strong, horrific ambience: "it did not have particularly outrageous visuals, but it was so well made it had this awful impact all the way through" (in Kermode, 2002: 16). Ferman describes a visceral affect associated with the horror film, but what is interesting here is that he could not pinpoint the specific parts of the film which upset him. The visceral, similarly, read as a hidden aspect of the image, may well be hidden precisely because of the nature of the medium

[3] Thompson's "The Concept of Cinematic Excess" (1980) points out that instances wherein elements can 'exceed' a narrative function can occur potentially anywhere. I would suggest the visceral operates slightly differently, occurring in far more specific types of films, ones in which there is already an antagonistic characteristic to their construction, as detailed here with regard to Cassavetes and Cronenberg's works

[4] As mentioned in the example from the opening of *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie* in the Introduction here

[5] Thompson (1980), as mentioned in the chapter, "The Visceral: from Adjective to Noun", speaks of 'excess' in terms of a non-diegetic feature that interrupts the diegesis of the narrative. Theorising sound as a device that allows the visceral to enter the film is a further example of how such binary concepts as diegetic/non-diegetic fail to define the visceral as a specific element in a specific context

[6] Cronenberg's soundtracks, indeed, could be seen as fairly conventional in their evocation of themes in his films. *Naked Lunch*'s jazz, for instance, suggests the decadent 1950s ambience of William Burrough's world; the intimate orderliness of *Dead Ringers*' music adds to the sadness of the project. These certainly create a cohesive atmosphere in the films and add a further visceral dimension, the music adding another layer of undefinability.

I've had a response to the movie that I've never gotten from any of the other films.
I went o one of the first public screenings in Toronto and one guy, a doctor, said,
'Can you tell me why I feel so fucking sad having seen this film?' I said, 'It's a sad
movie.' Then I heard from someone else that a friend of his saw it and cried for
three hours afterwards. So I thought, 'That's what it is. That's what I wanted to
get at.' I can't articulate it. It's not really connected with gynaecology or twinness.
It has to do with that element of being human. It has to do with this ineffable
sadness that is an element of human existence. It's a distillation of that; the way
that poetry and really good art often distil an essence which is not the whole story,
but is perhaps so potent, one drop would kill you. It had come through a story
about twins and gynaecology, because it has to do with women, birth, frustration
and unrequited life. Not just love. But the sadness wasn't in the script.
(Cronenberg, in Rodley, 1997: 149)

Worth adding here is the music to Tale of Tales' video game, *The Path*. The cacophony of instruments, and the dramatic, terrifying choral compositions that operate in tandem with player movement, create a powerful force that may nonetheless be closer to visceral *affect* than the visceral, *per se*

[7] As discussed by Mathijs and Sexton, 2011: 1-9

[8] Indeed, viewing films such as *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (Ed Wood, 1959) or *Godzilla* (Inoshiro Honda, 1954) as being potential exponents of the visceral reinvigorates these films much in the way Mathijs and Sexton suggest is already happening, moving academic appreciation of cult cinema away from a merely ironic appreciation. See Mathijs and Sexton, 2011: 86-96

[9] For example, Eddie Shaw in *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie*, or Leon Wagner in *A Woman under the Influence*. Cassavetes discusses his approach to working with actors and non-actors in *Cassavetes on Cassavetes* (2001)

[10] The nudity, however, is there. Fine (2005) certainly speaks of Cassavetes' tendency towards Puritanism in matters of the depiction of sexuality in his films. There is evidence of this antagonism towards nudity that seaps through the narrative cracks in *Husbands*. Fooling around on the hotel bed during his date with Mary in London – which entails mostly games of non-sexualised horseplay – Cassavetes' character of Gus abruptly stops joking, telling Mary to pull the hem of her dress down back to her knees as he can 'see everything.' In fact, it is not Gus who can see everything (he is laid beside Mary) but the camera, positioned at the foot of the bed, which offers a view of Mary's legs and tights, but nothing more. At the point he says, 'I hate that,' the question arises as to whether this is an aspect of performance, or of direction. This moment further complicates a film already rich with non-sequiturs, breaks in narrative cohesion and the capacity to put the viewer through an ordeal of patience

[11] Of his texts, Barthes' writings on the Marquis de Sade in *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* are possibly the most appropriate. Here, Barthes discusses the pleasures of concealment and revelation in sexual practices, suggesting a continuum and interrelationship between the conditions of libertinism and Puritanism (1976: 123, *passim*)

[12] In "The Third Meaning," Barthes writes of the "obstinacy of presence shown by any human body" (1977: 54). In Levinas, morality too is linked to this obstinacy. Indeed, one of the intangible 'facts' of our ethical regard for others is tied up with the idea that the human face reveals something of an infinity of possibility that cannot be grasped by our empirically-structured understanding of the world. Here, ethics exist before time and has no resemblance to our concepts of humanity and the

self: "Ethics is not a moment of being; it is otherwise and better than being, the very possibility of the beyond" (Levinas, 1996: 141; Girgus, 2010: 5). Clearly the huge implications of this line of thinking are beyond the scope of this conclusion. It is a tantalising prospect, however, particular with regard to how it moves this Barthesian reading of the visceral beyond aesthetics and ideology into questions of morality

[13] In this final mention of the word viewer, it is worth saying, finally, that this work of theory would be interestingly applied as empirical research. Faced with the ineffable, *visceral* characteristics of the image, how would an audience respond and describe these images? This would be a fascinating endeavour that could be placed in the aegis of audience and reception studies

APPENDIX A:

THE VISCERAL (a relational model)

The following model is a visual guide to how the visceral relates to those forces it works against, namely narrative (discussed in the chapter "Cassavetes and Cronenberg: Lists and Emptiness") and theatricality/spectacle (discussed in the chapter "Effects"). Both spectacle and narrative are regarded here as having an ideological basis by which they can be understood by the viewer.
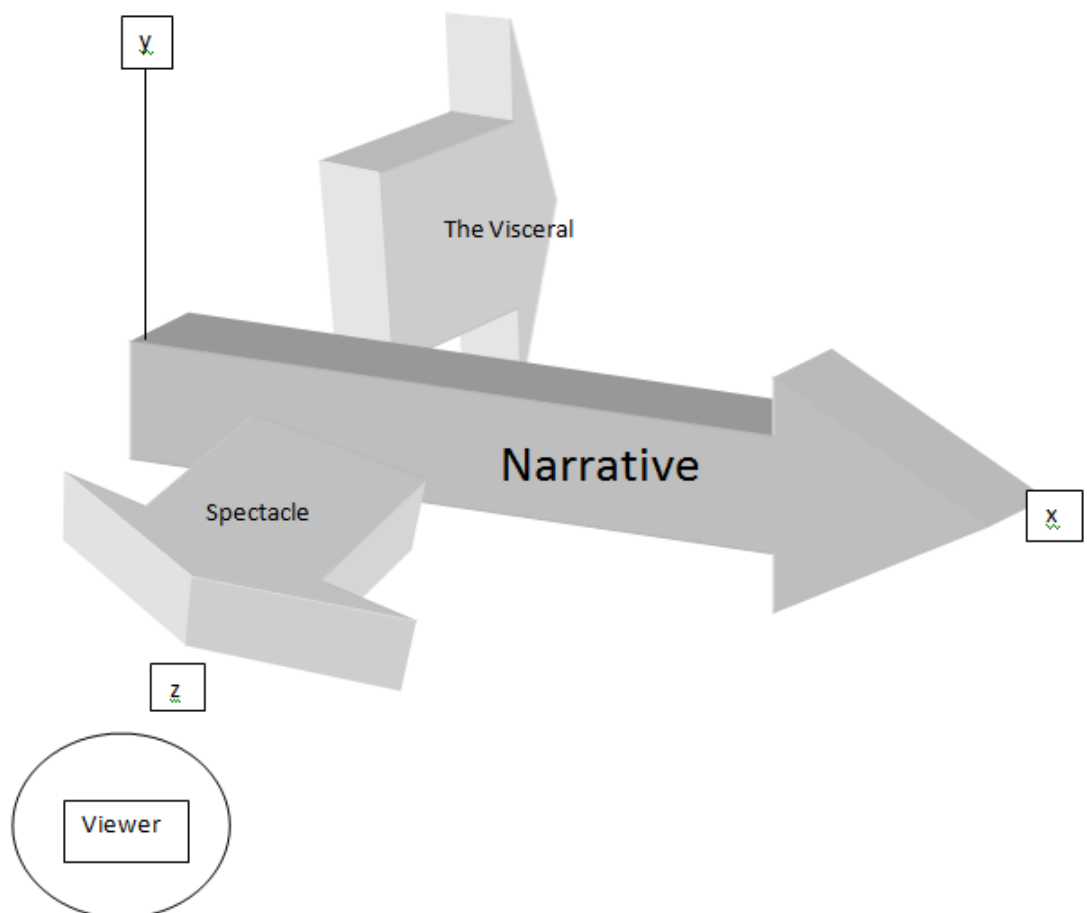

Figure 22: The Visceral (a relational model)

The movement of the visceral is hypothesised here in relation to three axes of understanding. The x-axis is what Metz (1974) calls the syntagmatic axis. It is the axis of progress, cause-and-effect and narrative. The y-axis corresponds with Metz's idea of the paradigmatic axis, the more-or-less infinite possibilities afforded the filmmaker when choosing what *exactly* to film. The z-axis, as mentioned by Wolf

(2009) is the perpendicular arrangement of the spectacle as it reaches out to the viewer (pictured as a circle in this diagram). Note how the arrow which represents spectacle is placed along the x-axis. This suggests how spectacle – while it may be seen to be non-narrative in its reception – in fact harmonises with the cause-and-effect structure of the syntagmatic axis. This is because, *for the purposes of this study*, it makes sense as a structure within the film as it is there to thrill or impress the viewer. Working in the opposite direction along the z-axis is the visceral itself, which moves away from the viewer's attempts to interpret it. Pictured on the vertical, y-axis, the visceral is shown to be resistant to the sense-making structures of both spectacle *and* narrative. Illustrated in this way, the visceral is seen to disrupt the flow of the film, 'as if from above.' After all, in Metz's model, the paradigmatic axis is meant as merely a demonstration of the many choices available to the filmmaker in the process of making a film. Here, however, it is revealed as a method by which sense can be halted by the visceral.

APPENDIX B

CASSAVETES AND CRONENBERG:
AN ANNOTATED FILMOGRAPHY

Arranged alphabetically, the following list of films is not intended to outline all films and television work accredited to John Cassavetes and David Cronenberg.[1] Instead its inclusion here has two aims. The first is to offer more information on the films discussed extensively throughout this thesis. Second, it allows an opportunity to mention other works associated with these two filmmakers that have not featured as main topics of study here. These entries should be regarded as general background material on the films used to illustrate a theory of the visceral, particularly as discussed within the core chapters.

Dead Ringers/Crash (Cronenberg, 1988/1996). In terms of character, possibly Cronenberg's most explicit example of the visceral as an aspect of characters in cool acceptance of the extreme circumstances in which they find themselves. In *Videodrome*, *Naked Lunch* and *eXistenZ*, which place their protagonists in webs of intrigue, the viewer might be able to fool himself that these films' protagonists may wish to extricate themselves from their situations. *Dead Ringers*' Mantle twins and the Ballards in *Crash*, however, are already 'broken' as ideologically pure constructs even before their lives take a sinister turn towards, respectively, drug addiction and an erotic impulse to be disfigured in car wrecks. The earlier film offers a device that also accesses the visceral, particular to the era in which it was made. In creating the Mantle twins, the actor Jeremy Irons was required to 'double' his performance, occasionally appearing onscreen as both brothers simultaneously. However, the film was created in the era between films such as *The Dead Ringer* (Paul Henreid, 1964), which used static split-screen effects to allow twins to appear as part of the same *mise-en-scene*, and the utilisation of digital technology to replicate a single actor who can physically interact with himself in *Multiplicity* (Harold Ramis, 1996). As a result *Dead Ringers*' 'twinning effects' do have the freedom and fluidity of movement afforded by advances in the fusion of computer and camera.[2] However,

as the actor can not *yet* be realised as a separate, digital entity, he must remain separate from his other self onscreen, so that physical interactions between the Mantles are enacted through cuts and the utilisation of doubles who must be disguised by other aspects of the *mise-en-scene* and a careful choice of composition. The real tragedy of *Dead Ringers*, then, is the incompatibility of brother and brother at the centre of the screen, the visceral appearing as a 'no man's land' commensurate with the restrictions of technology.

Eastern Promises (Cronenberg, 2007). A Russian girl trafficked to London to be traded in the sex industry dies giving birth to a daughter fathered by the head of the *vory v zakone*, a part of the Russian criminal underworld. The child is unofficially adopted by a second-generation Russian nurse, Anna, whose attempts to find out as much about the baby's heritage brings her into contact with Nikolai, ostensibly the driver for the organisation. The film is discussed during the "Cities" chapter here, but offers further anomalies with other fictional portrayals of London. The casting in particular has Naomi Watts, a British actress raised in England and Australia and associated with films made in Hollywood (*Mulholland Dr.* (David Lynch, 2000), *The Ring* (Gore Verbinski, 2002)) as the daughter of an English mother and a Russian father. The French actor Vincent Cassell plays the heir of the Russian crime family. The American Viggo Mortensen plays Nikolai, the Russian-born Armin-Mueller Stahl is the head of the *vory v zakone* and the Polish director Jerzy Skolimowski is Anna's uncle. These roles deviate from the parts associated with these actors (even Mueller-Stahl, who is associated with vaguely Polish, German and/or Jewish roles in *Music Box* (Costa-Gavras, 1989), *Avalon* (Barry Levinson, 1990) through to Ron Howard's *Angels and Demons* (2009)) but in fairly subtle ways, both an avowal of European multiculturalism, and a refusal to settle on stable definitions of 'identity.' Furthermore, Cronenberg's decision to not feature guns in the film dismantles the 'reality' of the crime fiction, just as the particular framing of shots remove the characteristics of London from the *mise-en-scene*.

The Fly (Cronenberg, 1986) is a remake of the 1958 original by Kurt Neumann, which is itself adapted from a story by George Langelaan. As in previous versions, the story details an experiment in teleportation whereby a male scientist is unaware that, as he uses himself as a test case, a fly has crept into the testing environment.

Unlike the previous versions, which separate the two organisms into two distinct bodies comprised of human and insect properties (notably in the transposition of heads) the fusion of man and fly occurs at a molecular level, so that the scientist is seen to physically fall apart as he loses his humanity and become a fly. As with earlier films in Cronenberg's *oeuvre* the transformation is largely achieved through the application of special make-up effects. Interestingly the macabre process of change itself can be read as abstracted from its narrative cause; the science occurs on a computer screen, remote and impenetrable, conveyed through algorithms, numeric calculations and wireframe models. The visceral is indeed a hidden facet here, the coolness of the technological event disjointed from the physical decay, which is revealed as a human tragedy, a gruesome reality and a series of special effects in the manner discussed in the chapter "Effects" with regard to *Videodrome*.

Husbands (Cassavetes, 1970). Subtitled "A Comedy about Life, Death and Freedom" the film has three middle-aged friends (Gus, Harry and Archie) drinking, singing, vomiting and fooling around following the funeral of Stuart, the fourth member of their group. Their journey takes them from New York to London where the men pick up dates in the bars, hotels and casinos of the city. The film resists easy classification as discussed throughout the thesis here, with London in particular offering neither spectacle nor sense as a backdrop in the second section of the film. Even so, the DVD box art for *Husbands* features a watermarked image of Big Ben, absent from the film itself. Belying its subtitle, the film comes across as neither a comedy, nor 'about' anything other than the kinetic movement of bodies in real-world, but nonetheless fairly anonymous spaces.

The Killing of a Chinese Bookie (Cassavetes, 1976/1978). Cosmo Vitelli is the owner of a strip club in Los Angeles. Incurring gambling debts in a casino run by gangsters, Cosmo is given the option to pay or to wipe the slate clean by murdering the head of a rival family (the Chinese bookie of the title). Two versions of the film exist. The second, edited by Cassavetes, excises much of the nudity present in the scenes of incongruous and amateurish 'erotic' productions, in which the girls extemporise clumsy burlesque routines. They are accompanied by the on-stage presence of Mr. Sophistication, who sings standards such as "I Can't Give You Anything But Love." As with Cronenberg's *Eastern Promises*, the 'reality' of the

crime drama as it corresponds with certain genre tropes is put under question. Here it is through the film's reluctance to push ahead to the titular event and the stilted and de-focused dramas of the staged setpieces (both in the club and during Cosmo's shootouts with the gangsters). The visceral therefore appears, in one guise at least, as a resistance to the formal and thematic constraints of the gangster movie.

Love Streams (Cassavetes, 1984). Based on the stage play written by Ted Allan, this is the second film in which he and Cassavetes collaborated. The first was *The Webster Boy* (Don Chaffey, 1962) made in Ireland at Ardmore Studios. *Love Streams* depicts the parallel lives of brother and sister, Robert Harmon and Sarah Lawson. Robert is a writer whose solipsistic lifestyle alienates his already estranged ex-wife and pre-teen son. Sarah is facing a divorce even though she believes that love will keep her, her husband and child united. As with *Husbands* there are journeys which do not suggest the ambience of their destinations: Robert takes his son to Las Vegas; Sarah travels alone to France and England (the latter signalled by the inclusion in the *mise-en-scene* of a red telephone box in what appears to be a cavernous soundstage). Also, as with *Husbands*, the plot is audaciously arbitrary in its construction. The film is discussed in the chapter, "Effects."

Naked Lunch (Cronenberg, 1992). The adaptation of William Burroughs' novel is far more consciously structured as a narrative than the source material's catalogue of "routines."[3] The film therefore serves to illustrate Cronenberg's love of chronology in his films (a trait he shares with Cassavetes), with the narrative structured as a spy story. The central protagonist, Bill Lee is coolly unsurprised by the exotic world of Mugwumps and typewriter-insect hybrids, and double- and triple agents who are variously manipulating Lee into working for, and defying the corporation of Interzone. See the chapter, "John Cassavetes and David Cronenberg: Lists and Emptiness." One further point is worthwhile mentioning here with regard to Cronenberg's attitude to the relationship between film and writing. In a verbal exchange between Lee and a typewriter that has adopted the shape of a Mugwump head, the creature uses the phrase, 'This is very potent.' In the context of the conversation the potency could refer to any number of things. Browning, discussing this scene sees that this phrase could allude to the quality of Bill's writing, to the pleasure the creature gains from Bill's touch as he manipulates the keys that occupy

the Mugwump's mouth, to the seminal fluid that drips from an elongated protuberance that grows from its head, to the drugs that could be causing this hallucinatory circumstance (2007: 109-128). This sequence reveals that the image can be more than merely a driving force of plot: it can dwell outside the laws of cause-and-effect, in this case only hinting at the real impetus – to repeat, the act of writing – that is occurring 'elsewhere,' offscreen. Cronenberg allows that this is a condition of making films about the act of writing. He says that in order to convey writing to someone who has never written, the filmmaker has to be quite outrageous in his techniques.[4]

Shadows (Cassavetes, 1959). Based on a series of improvisations developed in Cassavetes' acting workshop (echoed in the use of a 'freeform' jazz score on the soundtrack), the film follows the lives of three African American siblings living in New York. Despite this ethnic background being evident in the two older brothers the youngest, Lelia is able to pass for being white. This causes problems for her relationship with a young white man as his prejudices surface when he meets her brothers, discovering her true racial heritage. Shot in a loose, rough style in 16mm, the film betrays Cassavetes' willingness to allow experiment to interfere with the formal properties of his narratives. Also, as with Cronenberg's *Eastern Promises*, *Shadows* creates interesting juxtapositions with regard to casting of actors playing a national 'type' that slightly deviates from the apparent truth of their heritage. Lelia and one of her brothers, Ben are played by Lelia Goldoni and Benito Carruthers, of Sicilian heritage, while Hugh, the eldest is in fact African American. As Charity notes, this familial relationship here confused some viewers, "because the convention for casting blacks with white skins was to cast a white – like Sandra Dee in Sirk's *Imitation of Life*" (2001: 30-31).

Rabid (Cronenberg, 1977). A doctor appends a skin graft on a young woman, Rose, after she is injured in a motorcycle accident. The graft mutates and causes its host to seek out human blood. Her victims become crazed, causing panic and a state of martial law in the city. There are comparisons here to Cronenberg's earlier **Shivers** (1975), set in the luxury Starliner Tower, in which the method by which the disease (in this case parasitic) spreads from host to host is via intensified, sexualised contact. Indeed, as noted by Lowenstein (quoting the film), the scientist responsible for the

birth of the parasites was intent on "turning the world into one beautiful, mindless orgy" (2005: 157). However, whereas the parasite here is located within the *mise-en-scene*, the method by which the initial contagion spreads in *Rabid* is not. Read as being a spiked protuberance that extends from the site of the skin graft under Rose's arm and stings her victim, the exact physiological location is never specified. What is seen at the moment the victim is 'stung is an extreme close-up of the organ. Its existence within the diegesis can be read as abstract and not necessarily diegetic at all.

Spider (Cronenberg, 2002). Based on Patrick McGrath's novel, the film features Spider, an inmate in a psychiatric institution released and sent to a dingy half-way house where he begins to remember events from his childhood revolving around his mother's relationship with man that leads to murder. As Mathijs observes, "*Spider*'s story [...] offers a closely controlled narrative that first appears to be labyrinthine but which in the end makes perfect sense" (2008: 207). During the process of rewatching within which the visceral is seen to remain in place, the plot is therefore not what creates *Spider*'s unfathomable quality. It is, instead, the impenetrability of the character of Spider's thoughts, revealed in his notebooks as a sort of runic handwriting, as discussed in the chapter "John Cassavetes and David Cronenberg: Lists and Emptiness."

Too Late Blues/A Child is Waiting/Big Trouble (Cassavetes, 1961/1962/1985). Made between *Shadows* and *Faces*, *Too Late Blues* and *A Child is Waiting* are fascinating hybrids of the Cassavetes style as confronted by the Hollywood system. Under the *aegis* of Paramount and United Artists' Larcas Productions, respectively, the first was filmed in California in thirty days with a crew who, according to Cassavetes, "didn't like me, didn't trust me and didn't care about the film" (Charity, 2001: 40). The second, produced by Stanley Kramer, was neither written nor edited by Cassavetes. A story about a home for mentally disabled children, Cassavetes refused to sentimentalise his characters, but was forced to compromise with Kramer who wanted the message about institutional care prioritised over the observations of the children's behaviour within the setting. *Big Trouble* was Cassavetes' last film, a project directed for Columbia and seen, alongside the other two films mentioned here, as his least personal project (36), although the rifts between the Cassavetes

method and the Hollywood system may produce viewing experiences that are as potentially visceral as others in the director's *oeuvre*. Together these films could display a hidden quality similar to that detected by censor James Ferman during his attempts to re-edit *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* for reasons of decency.[5]

Videodrome (Cronenberg, 1982). Max Renn is the executive of a cable TV station whose desire to produce something stronger than the soft pornography featured on the station leads him to discover "Videodrome," a programme consisting entirely of torture, rape and murder, with no plot. Told that the makers of the broadcast are dangerous because they have a philosophy, Renn is nonetheless drawn into the world of Videodrome. As with the protagonists of the later *Naked Lunch* and ***eXistenZ*** (1999), the effect Videodrome has on the viewer is of a disorienting fusion of several different realities, each of which casts Renn as a puppet in a larger conspiracy. The creation of the hand/gun fusion mentioned in the chapter "Effects" here is one such reality. Renn's own ability to largely accept the realities of a world whose distorted logic is evident only to the viewer removes much of Renn's appeal as the focus of viewer empathy.

A Woman under the Influence (Cassavetes, 1974). Mabel Longhetti is a housewife in suburban California whose exuberance and child-like view of the world is read as symptomatic of a nervous breakdown. Her husband Nick has her committed to a mental institution. When she returns she is a relatively muted presence and attempts suicide. While much academic emphasis is centred on Gena Rowlands' performance here, the camera and the edit are able to create a perplexing architectural space from the Longhetti home, even more incredible as the film is shot not on a set, but in the Cassavetes house. The film becomes complicit in creating a labyrinth to the point where one character, Garson Cross (with whom Mabel may or may not have had a one-night stand) vanishes inexplicably from the narrative, swallowed by the architecture of the suburban home. The visceral appears as a rupture in both the spatial and dynamic structure of the film, dissolving the logic of a contiguous story in a confusing array of doors and corridors.

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[1] For a complete filmography on each director's *oeuvre*, see for example Charity, 2001: 217-239; and Mathijs, 2008: 276-283

[2] Cronenberg's regular cinematographer from *Dead Ringers* onwards is Peter Suschitzky. Prior to his work here, he was director of cinematography on the second *Star Wars* film, *The Empire Strikes Back* (Irvin Kershner, 1980). The *Star Wars* films pioneered the ability of the camera to 'move' while recording the movements of scale models. Here, as in *Dead Ringers*, a computer programme connected to the camera captured the incremental, frame-by-frame movements of the models using the same camera motion (see Klein, 2004; North, 2008)

[3] As mentioned by the author in the TV documentary, *Naked Making Lunch*

[4] From *Naked Making Lunch*

[5] See my "Conclusion" **note 2**

GLOSSARY

The terms referenced here are ones used in this thesis in relation to the concept of the visceral. They are thus seen to help define and expand the meaning of the term 'the visceral' as a hidden aspect of the filmed image. This glossary offers these terms in relation to their usage within the chapters.

appendage In the analogue special effect, a section of the *mise-en-scene* that has no function as a part of the image. This is particularly the case in special effects sequences that detail transformations, whereby anomalies between the various stages of the special effect are revealed, such as the fusion of hand and gun in *Videodrome*. These appendages are seen as 'visceral' because they serve neither the plot nor the illusion of spectacle: they point out the constructedness of the effect.

arbitrariness In semiology, as it appertains to written and spoken language, the relationship between the acoustic or written image (signifier) and its interpretation (signified), is regarded as being based on conventions as formulated within ideological frameworks. This relationship is entirely constructed as a device made to seem normal within cultures, so is therefore regarded as arbitrary. Metz (1974) maintains that because the filmed image is like the thing photographed (a filmed dog is like a dog) there can be no arbitrariness in the relationship between signifier and signified. However, the visceral foregrounds the arbitrary characteristics of images by signalling discrepancies in the film that do not make sense as either fictional constructs or recorded versions of the 'real' world. The visceral therefore highlights that filmed images are as ideologically constructed as written and spoken language. Moreover the arbitrariness the visceral signals is exposed as a facet of the image that does not exist spatially or temporally as part of that image, so cannot be understood by the conventions by which we speak or write about film.

diachrony The logical procession of images over time. In film, as proposed by Metz, the basis of cause-and-effect that informs narrative cinema. Both **excess** and the visceral can interrupt diachronic reasoning by halting the flow of meanings generated by the sequential characteristics of narrative.

excess In Thompson (2004) a force that seeks to break up the unity of a film, resisting the logical structures of the film as a text. Thompson sees these interruptions as non-diegetic and able to be sought out by the viewer. In this way excess differs from the visceral, which disrupts the foundations of both form and narrative, and so cannot be ignored by the viewer.

faceicity According to Deleuze (2005) an object that is fabricated (such as a digitally created dinosaur in *Jurassic Park*) but nonetheless accepted as 'real' by the viewer because it offers a plausible counterpart to the image as it would appear in the real world. This is distinct from an object that is an example of **faceification**. In faceification, the object cannot convey the complexity of tiny movements that the perceived naturalness of faceicity suggests. The visceral is neither entirely an object of faceification or faceicity because the inconsistencies of the image are still perceived to be real enough to be disturbed by those aspects that are felt to be false.

filmic A condition of film that exists outside the realm of language. It can be seen as synonymous with **the third meaning**, but applicable to cinematic forms of address.

indication/indicative In Derrida (1973) the opposite to intent, meaning, sense. Regarded as "the process of death at work" indication resists the cultural truths by which films are understood. It does so by creating impure forms of expression which signal the transgression of good taste, in particular with regards to the visceral, the boundaries of narrative in the fiction film (40).

metonymy According to Barthes, the sequential ordering of narrative as a series of signs (1985). The visceral interferes with the meaningful progression of metonymic structures.

paradigm In Metz (1974) the list of possible choices a filmmaker can make in constructing a shot. Cause-and-effect narratives are made up of a series of individual images selected from all possible paradigms, so that sequences progress uninterrupted. Metz refers to this line of cause and effect as **syntagmatic**. Conceived spatially, the syntagm can be understood as a horizontal line extending along the x-axis, while the paradigm is a vertical line illustrating all the possibilities open to the filmmaker in constructing a certain aspect of a shot. The visceral can be seen as a disruption to the horizontal progress of narrative *as if* ruptured by the paradigmatic axis that exists outside of temporal discourse.

punctum Barthes' *Camera Lucida* (1981) conceives that the still photograph contains two elements. The *studium* describes particular areas of cultural interest for the spectator. These exist as identifiable details such as "the figures, the faces, the gestures, the settings, the actions." The *punctum* is an element that disturbs the *studium* and pricks the spectator's consciousness. It cannot be classified as coded within the physical facts of the photograph. It is unidentifiable as an empirical part of the image. For this reason the *punctum* has many corollaries with the visceral, even as it explicitly refers to another medium.

subjunctive An expression of possibility, used in grammar to suggest an action that has not yet happened. With regard to the visceral, the subjunctive suggests the simultaneity of possible actions that occur outside the cause-and-effect structures of narratives.

synchrony A moment in time visualised as the fulfilment of selection from all the possible ways a shot could be composed. In this context it comprises all the elements that unite to further the **diachronic** procession of narrative. The visceral, in contrast to this reification of components, is *a*synchronous. It is not bound to the structures through which narrative progresses.

theatre In Fried (1967; 2005) a work of art that actively involves the viewer. This can be seen as roughly equivalent to the spectacular moments in cinema. Applied initially to the sculptural forms of minimalist art, theatre exists in film as the attempted assimilation of viewer and image the visceral successfully ruptures.

third meaning In Barthes (1977) a method of conveyance through which an image is read by the viewer. In Barthes' schema, the third meaning follows on from the first two levels of connotation, which are 'communication' and 'symbolism.' These primary methods by which the image is received are regarded as entirely interpretable as they correspond with the image as a replication of its real world counterpart. The third meaning, however, obstinately refuses to be read. In Barthes' terms, it is a signifier without a signified. It is therefore an image without meaning. It corresponds with Thompson's concept of **excess**, so is more subtle in its affect on the viewer than the other Barthesian term, the *punctum*. Nonetheless, in questioning the dominance of language, the third meaning is crucial to advancing a theory of the visceral.

writerly A parallel interpretation of a text that resists standard definitions of that text. Barthes (1970) sets the writerly against the **readerly**, which is the imposed, ostensibly true meaning of a text. The visceral is writerly because it destabilises interpretations, forcing an active engagement with film that violates the logic of narrative or the thrill of spectacle.

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