THE AESTHETICS OF VIOLENT MOVING IMAGES

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ABSTRACT

Physical violence reveals the fragility of human bodies and the vulnerability of our world. At the same time, physical violence reveals the power of the body by demonstrating the various ways in which one person may be harmed by another person. Interestingly, realistic moving images of interpersonal corporeal violence portraying this graphic and gruesome destruction are produced and consumed in mass. As such, the ubiquity of violent moving images obliges a deeper analysis to understand the phenomenon of the appeal of viewing violence. My dissertation is an effort to explicate the aesthetics of violent moving images in order to proffer a more complete explanation for the allure of a specific kind of violent imagery I call realist strong violent moving images. It will become evident that realist strong violent moving images provide a unique phenomenological experience that other kinds of violent moving images do not afford. Realist strong violent moving images ontologically fail to be reliable evidence of real live violent events, but also fail to be sufficiently obscure to provide mere mindless or thrilling entertainment. However, realist strong violent moving images afford the possibility of satisfying a desire for self-inflicted violence. As such, a deeper understanding of the allure of realist strong violent moving images provides a fuller explanation of the allure of viewing violence and moves us toward a better understanding of the allure of actual violence.

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DEDICATION

For Kiva, Maxwell, and Vegas

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CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM OF AN AESTHETICS OF VIOLENT MOVING IMAGES

Introduction

An aesthetics of violent moving images is motivated by a need to understand more profoundly and completely the allure of a specific phenomena I call realist strong violent moving images. Since realist strong violent moving images are fictional representations, they do not offer educational value by providing a reliable record of an event in the same way that non-fiction video can provide evidence of past and present violence. Further, by their ability to facilitate confrontations and reflections on moral perspectives of violence, realist strong violent moving images do not provide the same mindless entertainment derived from iconic action and horror movies and so cannot be explained by appeals to notions of monster fascination, traditional accounts of character engagement, or compelling narratives. As such, an aesthetics of violent moving images with a specific focus on realist strong violent moving images provides a more profound and complete understanding of the allure of graphic, gruesome, and disturbing violent imagery that is visually indistinguishable from its abhorred non-fiction counterpart but is nevertheless consumed in mass and increasingly ubiquitous.

Chapters 1 and 2 of this dissertation define realist strong violent moving images, a definition which leads to the question of the allure of this distinct sub-type of violent moving images. Chapter 1 defines a number of vague concepts, namely, moving images, violence, and the notion of strong and weak violence. Chapter 1further demonstrates that strong violent moving images allow for profound self-reflective contemplation and

possible shifts in moral position in virtue of being moving images of interpersonal corporeal violence. Interpersonal corporeal violence is essentially violence that is intentional, naturalized, anti-technological, and uncertain, and is about pain and suffering, destruction and ruin, and the body. However, since strong violent moving images are still a broad category, Chapter 2 classifies a kind of strong violent moving images I call realist strong violent moving images. In order to accomplish an accurate characterization of realist strong violent moving images, Chapter 2 develops a continuum of violent moving images ranging from real live violent events, to indexical violent moving images, realist violent moving images, iconic violent moving images, and finally symbolic violent moving images. A continuum of violent moving images not only classifies violent moving images without appeal to traditional genre categories, but further resolves the dilemma of unavoidable overlaps or imbrications that strict and rigid definitions cannot handle. Having adequately defined realist strong violent moving images, Chapters 3 and 4 discuss whether any current theories of the allure of viewing violence are explanatorily adequate to fully account for the allure of this specific type of violent moving imagery.

Chapters 3 and 4 of this dissertation reassess the dominant explanations for the allure of violent moving images, and test the catharsis hypothesis and edification hypothesis for explanatory strength against realist strong violent moving images. Chapter 3 questions the adequacy and exclusivity of the catharsis hypothesis that claims the allure of viewing violence is the possibility of purging unwanted emotions or feelings. Chapter 3 demonstrates that besides failing to adequately define the catharsis process as allopathic or homeopathic, most accounts of the cathartic process neglect the importance of the

group dynamic and lasting edification as central to explaining the modern allure and experience of realist strong violent moving images. Chapter 4, then, posits edification as the principal appeal of realist strong violent moving images. Chapter 4 argues that many accounts of edification rely on vague or superficial notions of sympathy, empathy, simulation, identification, and empathy that require refinement to achieve explanatory strength; however, many characterizations of empathy are more accurately understood as sympathy, or at least weak empathy. Chapter 4 contends that strong empathy, if possible, is better understood as a more complex and rare process of emotive mirroring or shared consciousness. However, discussions of metaphysical consciousness exchange in relation to realist strong violent moving images neglects an explanation for why viewers are attracted to the very prominent visual violence in realist strong violent moving images as opposed to empathetic responses to non-violent imagery. Therefore, finding the catharsis hypothesis and edification hypothesis incomplete explanations for the allure of realist strong violent moving images, Chapter 5 proffers the argument that realist strong violent moving images, unlike other types of violent and non-violent moving images, are also alluring because they enable the manifestation of an ascetic ideal of self-inflicted violence, in other words, the images of violence are alluring because of the experience of the violence contained therein per se.

In conclusion, Chapter 5 uses the socially prevalent phenomenon of deliberate self-harm to demonstrate the latent desire some individuals have for self-inflicted violence and how such a desire might arise from the recognition of human suffering, social and individual, and the need to eschew meaningless suffering and pain. Imposing

self-harm on oneself transforms meaningless suffering into power and control and creates an ascetic ideal that, absent engaging in actual violence, watching actual violence, or other satisfactory outlet, is fed by mimetic representations of violence, that is, satisfied by the experience of watching realist strong violent moving images. Through aspects of catharsis, edification, and particularly a strong empathetic experience, viewers of strong violent moving images are able to direct violence inward by becoming the agent and victim of violence; this is an allure of realist strong violent moving images as distinct from other violent and non-violent moving images, that is, one of the last acceptable outlets for violence, violence against the self. However, this more complete answer to the question of the allure of realist strong violent moving images, and ultimately insight into the allure of real violence, never gets a proper exegesis without first moving beyond the dominant discussions of violent media.

<div align="center">Moving Beyond the Causal Hypothesis</div>

The problem of an aesthetics of violent moving images is the problem of overcoming entrenched hypotheses derived from abductive reasoning and the acceptance of universal but vague and ineffable definitions of violent media. Unrelated subjective observations coupled with extrapolations from anecdotal evidence and ambiguous empirical data replace critical exegesis. Underlying many contemporary analyses of violent media is the assumption that the only pertinent discussion concerns the presence, or lack thereof, of a causal relationship between violent imagery and actual violent behavior. Any serious analysis of violent media that defers or segregates moral judgment and instead focuses on tangential concerns is seen as placing academic theory over

practical social issues. At the risk of temporarily neglecting the latter, this dissertation is

an addition to the philosophy of violence, an aesthetics of violent moving images, which

will provide insight into the larger problem of violence.

The first problem of an aesthetics of violent moving images is best understood as

the problem of moving beyond the causal debate in order to more profoundly understand

the fundamental nature of the allure of violent media. As such, an aesthetics of violent

moving images must begin with a brief discussion of current trends of thought

concerning popular violent media that support and refute the casual hypothesis.

Proponents of the causal hypothesis theorize that there is a direct provable causal link

between viewing violent media and being violent or aggressive. This worry becomes

overwhelming because of parental concern for the moral health of children and the

negative impact of violence on society. Such moral and social concerns are not new; in

fact, Plato offers one of philosophy's strongest exhortations about the moral and social

harm of engaging with imitations of the worst of human behavior.

> For the young are not able to distinguish what is and what is not allegory,
> but whatever opinions are taken into the mind at that age are wont to prove
> indelible and unalterable. For which reason, maybe, we should do our
> utmost that the first stories that they hear should be composed as to bring
> the fairest lessons of virtue to their ears.[1]

Modern support for the causal hypothesis in relation to violent media echoes

Plato's larger concerns. In July of 2000, the influential and respected American

Academy of Pediatrics along with the American Psychological Association, American

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[1] Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, ed., *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*
(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 625.

Medical Association, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, American

Academy of Family Physicians, and American Psychiatric Association released a joint

statement touting that over 1000 scientific studies proved a causal connection between

violent media and violent or aggressive behavior.[2] However, a deeper analysis reveals

that reliable proof for the causal hypothesis comes from ambiguous if not outright

questionable scientific evidence.[3] No doubt some of the studies referenced by the

organizations above seem to lead to a causal theory of violent media, but an analysis of

the totality of the claims, and the studies themselves, is far from conclusive. In fact, a

seminal study by psychologists Seymour Feshbach and Robert D. Singer actually shows

the reverse effect. The study by Feshbach and Singer documented that when school aged

boys watched violent television they actually became less aggressive.[4] While some

scientific studies demonstrate an identifiable relationship or correlation between violent

media and aggression, the seemingly objective data can be attributed to a number of other

factors and unaccounted for variables; for example, children predisposed toward

aggressive behavior watch more violent media. It is disheartening that for all practical

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[2] American Academy of Pediatrics Policy Statement, Volume 95, Number 6 - June 1995.

[3] See Jonathan L. Freedman, *Media Violence and Its Effect on Aggression: Assessing the Scientific Evidence* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002) and Nancy Signorelli, *Violence in the Media: A Reference Handbook* (California: ABC-CLIO, 2005) and *Violence and Terror in the Mass Media: Annotated Bibliography* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1988) for contrasting conclusions of the totality of survey research, laboratory experiments, longitudinal studies, and field experiments. Freedman discounts the strength of the overall evidence supporting the causal hypothesis while Signorelli believes the overall evidence is sufficient to warrant strong concern and implicit proof of the causal hypothesis. General opinion seems to overwhelmingly support the causal hypothesis.

[4] Seymour Feshbach and Robert D. Singer, *Television and Aggression: An Experimental Field Study* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1971).

purposes discussion and debate of the casual hypothesis is closed and more recently redirected toward issues of regulation and censorship instead of deep analysis. Given the ambiguity of the scientific evidence, I propose a more fruitful approach to understanding violent media is an exploration into the allure of violent moving images.

Since access to violent media as entertainment has become the norm, it is relevant to begin an analysis of the allure of viewing violence by starting with the ubiquitous violent imagery available on television, in movies, and on the internet. Beyond its sheer pervasiveness and accessibility, what is the allure of viewing violent moving images? To begin to answer this question, I utilize a methodology from the analytic tradition of aesthetics to analyze the essential or necessary and sufficient conditions of violent moving images per se. Violent moving images are phenomenologically and experientially distinct from non-violent moving images like comedic or dramatic, but are also ontologically and epistemologically distinct from static images like paintings or photographs. In order to clarify these distinctions, I begin by briefly discussing the modern emergence and relatively new phenomenon of realistic violent moving images. Realist violent moving images are new because of the recent and increasing capacity of media technology to construct, represent, and disseminate live or realistic violence to greater and greater degrees of verisimilitude. Interestingly, realist violent moving images are also quickly emerging because of contemporary political and social pressures that have relatively quickly pushed out of public sight real live violent spectacles of the past. Recognizing the lengthy historical documentation of the allure of violent spectacles underscores the more important question of the source of the appetite for viewing

violence and as such refutes the critique that the only question worth exploring is that of

the validity of the causal hypothesis.

Implicit in Plato's discussion of the nature of the soul in Book IV of *The Republic*

is an early recognition of the powerful allure of the macabre.

> The story is, that Leontius, the son of Aglaion, coming up one day from
> the Piraeus, under the north wall on the outside, observed some dead
> bodies lying on the ground at the place of execution. He felt a desire to see
> them, and also a dread and abhorrence of them; for a time he struggled and
> covered his eyes, but at length the desire got the better of him; and forcing
> them open, he ran up to the dead bodies, saying, Look, ye wretches, take
> your fill of the fair sight.[5]

In addition, though, Plato's identification of the soul's appetite for ghastly and gruesome

images also hints that such a desire for viewing violence is natural. The prevalence and

popularity of very recent real live violent spectacles support Plato's early insights about

the allure of death and violence.

Without Sanctuary is a collection of photographs and postcards of lynching in

America assembled by James Allen that spans the decades before and after the turn of the

twentieth century. At times, the narrative newspaper accounts are more unpleasant to

read than the grainy sepia images are to see. These are a few of the details the static

images fail to convey:

> Trains brought in additional participants and spectators from surrounding
> cities…They sawed at his throat, cut off both his ears, cut out one eye, and
> stuffed handkerchiefs in the victim's mouth to stifle his 'awful screams'.
> Stabbing him repeatedly, the lynchers came close to cutting out his

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[5] Benjain Jowett, trans., *The Dialogues of Plato* (New York: MacMillon and Company, 1892), 132.

backbone. He was then dragged two blocks before the crowd emptied their guns into his body.[6]

A similarly terrible story of antecedent events accompanies each image of the dead. A reader is not privy to all these details, and that lack of knowledge, leaving the imagination to run wild, becomes a part of the mesmerizing allure of the images. For example, the large two-page image on the inside and back cover of the hardback book shows Jessie Washington's charred remains slumped next to a small leafless tree. Countless spectators, the frame excludes more than it includes, crowd the smoking corpse. The events preceding Jessie's death were horrific, but we do not know the details to a certainty. Jessie is not the man described in the quote above, nor is Elias, Frank, or William. In a way, though, it does not matter to the photograph, their stories all end the same, their bodies all equally lifeless hunks of flesh or unrecognizable mounds of burnt meat that are caught, and sometimes only remembered, in these images. All the victims were dragged and pushed from their homes and loved ones into the bright daylight and then bound, tortured, and murdered in front of familiar and anonymous faces which, in their nice pressed suits and white sun hats, gathered around some nondescript tree or light post to be entertained. At the time, violent public lynchings were family events offering the opportunity to bond with friends, rub shoulders with local powerful businessmen, and be justified by the presence of prominent government officials. Letters were sent to

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[6] James Allen et al., *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*, (New Mexico: Twin Palms Publishers, 2004), 15.

schools asking teachers to excuse children for the event, and souvenir postcards, ashes, or shards of bone were sold to commemorate the day's affair.[7]

Throughout history, violent public events have waxed and waned in prevalence and severity; however, since the appetite for violent spectacles has never stopped, violent public spectacles have never disappeared.[8] In fact, more socially acceptable violent public spectacles loom large as ever even if contemporary stadia fail to foster the intimacy local lynchings of the past created between spectators and victims.[9] Partly because the enormous venues for violent public spectacles that continue to rise up around the world remove spectators from each other and from participants, and partly because political and social pressures have lessened the levels of acceptable violence in public, eager spectators have flocked to new forms of unmediated or real violence.

Local governments have tried to accommodate shifting attitudes and preferences by devoting significant infrastructure and transportation systems to lure willing spectators

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[7] James Allen et al., *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*, (New Mexico: Twin Palms Publishers, 2004).

[8] Roman and Aztec gladiatorial combat was hugely popular and occurred inside and around large venues, probably because of their ritualistic and religious ties. However, torture and public execution of the Middle Ages more closely resembled the intimacy of lynchings than gladiatorial events. For more, see Mark Pizzato, *Theaters of Human Sacrifice: from ancient ritual to screen violence* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2005). Today, mixed martial arts events surpass football, hockey, and soccer in violent severity, but have also settled comfortably into a middle ground in terms prevalence, venue size, and spectator participation. Still, new violent public spectacles are reinvigorating or reawakening the desire and acceptability of live violent events, and as such the future path of public violence for entertainment purposes is largely unknown.

[9] Of course, this includes stadiums for football and soccer or arenas for wrestling, mixed martial arts, or hockey. However, the intimacy level is more pronounced, and might be a contributing factor for more dire consequences, in European countries. For more, see Alan, Roadburg, "Factors Precipitating Fan Violence: A Comparison of Professional Soccer in Britain and North America," *The British Journal of Sociology* 31.2 (June 1980): 265-276.

with cheap easy access to the home coliseum and its live violent spectacles. Today, however, an even easier way to satisfy violent hunger is to take a quick trip to the local video rental store and peruse the horror section. Increasingly, technology enables eager spectators to stay safely and inexpensively at home and watch extremely violent spectacles almost custom made for any particular taste. Disturbingly and graphically violent media are available by computer at any time of day or night. Although some of the experience of a live event is lost in degrees of mediatization, contemporary violent media represent the last bastion of ghastly violence since there are no longer public events that feature the relentless, unflinching, and horrific violence described and documented in *Without Sanctuary*. Mediated violence offers a decent trace of the full live experience, but what it lacks in the qualities liveness provides, it makes up for in gruesomeness. Mediated violent moving images are satisfyingly imbued with tinges of the real, shadowy enough to provide comfort, and yet bright enough to satiate.

Obviously, no shortage of gruesome or macabre violent media exists. The more important point is that the desire and allure for viewing violence has never subsided, it has just transformed and is now fed by a new medium which today is getting even closer to being able to imitate the appearance of the real thing. However, the sheer volume of violent media which spans from the theater, to photographs, to television shows, to film, to streaming video, and to internet clips, is so large that attempts at analyzing and defining a large portion of the phenomenon seems daunting. A worthwhile starting point is to begin to refine the language used to discuss and analyze violence. A thoughtful aesthetics of violent moving images distinguishes not just violent imagery from, for

example, comedic imagery, but also various types and kinds of violent imagery from each other. Since the word violence is often used in a vague and undefined way in everyday language, and often in academia as well, the second problem of an aesthetics of violent moving images is developing more accurate and useful definitions and terminology in order to discuss violent moving images more precisely.

Moving Beyond Colloquial and Academic Definitions of Violence

The problem of an aesthetics of violent moving images is that to accomplish a deeper and more complete understanding of the allure of violent media it is first necessary to adequately describe and define a specific type of violent media I call strong violent moving images. This refinement will provide a preliminary answer as to why this distinct type of violent media is so unique, and, further, why a sub-type – realist strong violent moving images – deserves to be the subject of analysis for the remainder of this dissertation. Ultimately, realist strong violent moving images ontologically fail to be reliable evidence of real live violent events, but also fail to be sufficiently obscure to provide mere mindless or thrilling entertainment. As such, disturbingly realistic strong violent moving images, which are consumed in mass, require further understanding. My analysis, and the subsequent fuller understanding of the allure of realist strong violent moving images, hopes to provide insight into the lengthy historical love people have for watching and ultimately possibly committing real violence.

The second problem of an aesthetics of violent moving images is a problem of rigorous language analysis. The widespread assumption is that the word violence when read or spoken is wholly, even if ineffably, understood. Struggling to define obscenity

and pornography, Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart famously but ambiguously wrote, "I shall not today attempt further to define the kinds of material [pornographic] I understand to be embraced within that shorthand description; and perhaps I could never succeed in intelligibly doing so. But I know it when I see it…"[10] Similar to pornography, violence is difficult to define and also powerfully attractive. Just as Plato elucidates the overpowering allure of the macabre in *The Republic*, Susan Sontag writes in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, "It seems that the appetite for pictures showing bodies in pain is as keen, almost, as the desire for ones that show bodies naked."[11] Thus, not only in allure, but in difficulty of definition, are the sensual and the macabre similar. However, to explore and explain the former it is necessary to define the latter; that is, to explore and explain the allure of violence it is necessary to first more precisely define violence. A clear and precise definition of violence has proven difficult for numerous institutions, organizations, and academic disciplines.

Literature, law, political science, social systems, individuals, and even entertainment rating boards have all in some manner or form attempted to define violence. For example, Y, E10+, G, Y7, eC, E, R is a small collection of symbols from television, film, and video game rating systems. Rating board symbols are in place to help guide parents in selecting the appropriate media for their children.[12] A quick glance,

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[10] *Jacobellis v. Ohio*, 378 U.S. 184, 197 (1964).

[11] Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picadur, 2003), 41.

[12] Overtly, yes, but Motion Picture Association of America rating symbols also covertly promote, support, or reinforce a certain social morality in America. The earlier Hollywood Production Code created by the Production Code Association, a stricter organization that

though, reveals the lack of transparency and depth contemporary taxonomies of violence articulate. For instance, a TV-14 program, suitable for ages 14 and up, with a V designator means that there is intense violence somewhere in the television show. However, for a TV-MA (mature) program, the V designates graphic violence. Y7 shows are generally violence free – they are for children around 7 years old – but an FV designator warns the viewer that there are scenes of fantasy violence. As such, television rating systems are generally confusing when it comes to figuring out just what type of violence a viewer is likely to stumble upon, and clearly some greater clarity can be brought to the equivocal television lexicon of violence.

The video game rating system is slightly less ambiguous, but cautious parents will need to pay attention to even more vague descriptors. Video game descriptors may reveal that a game contains, presumably in ascending order of severity: cartoon violence, violent references, fantasy violence, intense violence, or violence. All video game descriptors, though, can further be qualified with a preceding designation as 'mild.' As such, mild intense violence must mean that the violence is not quite as intense as intense violence, but it is still more violent than fantasy violence and therefore also twice as violent as mild fantasy violence. Ratings boards' efforts all seem for naught since ratings boards are meant to elucidate content in a simple and easily recognizable format. This is concerning, but even more concerning is the realization that the vague vocabulary used to

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preceded the MPAA, had its roots in Catholic Church morality – See Stephen Prince, ed., *Screening Violence* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 3. Although far less prescriptive and secular than the Production Code, today's MPAA rating system conforms to certain social and cultural values and norms as evident by the unequal way in which violence and sex are judged as affecting a films overall rating.

guide parents about entertainment purchases is the same one used to classify data in the

academic scientific studies that provide the empirical evidence in support of the causal

hypothesis. Unless there already is an unspoken and universal definition of violence, the

lack of rigor in defining violence calls into question any hypothesis or conclusion that

fails to rigorously define the specific type of violence under analysis.

Although we may all have a general idea that very young children should not

watch R rated movies, in a sense such a symbol for violence is entirely relative to time

and culture, and we might further ask if a real substantial symbol even exists. Further, if

we can question the clarity of these symbols of violence and the ambiguity and confusion

about the types of violence on television, in movies, and in video games, what does this

say about the reliability of empirical data based on the viewing of media that itself is only

vaguely defined as violent? Of course, parents survive, and make judgments, but when a

term that is supposed to be so clear and understood is characterized by indeterminate

definitions, or worse, ineffability, there is academic work to be done to clarify such a

commonly used word and such a commonly studied phenomenon.

Though there is nothing novel about scrutinizing representations of violence, or

violence itself, the word violence as used in academic disciplines remains vague and

unrefined. In part, this is a result of academic analyses following the mistaken

assumptions of rating boards that a general understanding or consensus exists when there

simply is not one. Often, an underdeveloped description of what is being referenced is

posited, but all this leaves unclear just what is meant when the term violence is used. As

a colloquialism, violence signifies something often ineffable; that is, what is signified is

often only pointed to rather than defined. As such, a more workable definition needs to

be developed for the purposes of this dissertation. However, I do not attempt to provide a

comprehensive definition of the word violence since that would undermine my notion of

violence as an extremely complex concept. Therefore, what follows is an effort to whittle

down the discussion to clarify what I mean when I use the word violence by locating and

correcting the flaws in discussions of violence within various academic disciplines.

Typically, although not exclusively, analyses of violence from a sociological or

psychological disciplinary methodology seek to explain violence in terms of cause,

effect, and experience. The social sciences predominantly explore whether viewing

violence causes aggression. Disciplines such as film studies or communication studies

explore the phenomenon differently and therefore are good as far as analyzing what the

discipline wishes to analyze, but do not go very far at analyzing violence per se. In fact,

by assuming a definition of violence, various disciplines set back efforts at understanding

violence and undermine their own results. For example, most laboratory and field

experiments in sociology and psychology make reference to the viewing of either violent

or non-violent media.[13] Test subjects are often described as simply subject to a steady

diet of violent television or non-violent television without any distinction between, for

example, comedic violence, animated violence, or realistic violence. It is uncontroversial

to say that there is little consistency across studies about what counts as violent or

aggressive media or behavior. The empirical research assumes the same general vague

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[13] See Jonathan L. Freedman's *Media Violence and Its Effect on Aggression: Assessing the Scientific Evidence* and Nancy Signorelli's *Violence in the Media: A Reference Handbook* and *Violence and Terror in the Mass Media: Annotated Bibliography*.

notion or acceptance of an unarticulated definition discussed above regarding ratings boards.

Film theory, film studies, and communication studies fair better, but still lack a concerted effort at defining specific notions of violence. At one end of the spectrum are analyses that dissect a particular film, a particular scene, or even a particular frame within a scene of what is generally understood as violent. At the other end of the spectrum are large sweeping discussions of violent media that paint with the broadest stokes possible. Although a lab experiment may explore the experience or behavior of participants who watch violence, there is still little effort to justify what gets classified as violent media. Most methods fall victim to the assumption that we all, reader and writer, have sufficiently defined violence or that we are all on the same page when we say something is violent. It is as if merely saying violent media quickly situates everyone on one and the same page or frame of reference. Although easier to oblige these assumptions, this is not where I wish to begin. I wish to discuss a certain type of violent media. While my analysis can extend to other forms of violent media, Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 of this dissertation are devoted to narrowing down or pinpointing just that particular violent media phenomenon that has yet to be fully explained and analyzed. Therefore, another problem of an aesthetics of violent moving images is defining the unarticulated; the problem of articulating the features or types of violent media that are assumed but never fully explained.

Articulating a Substantial Philosophical Conception of Violence

The third problem of an aesthetics of violent moving images is to articulate the term violence itself. Of course, violent images are derivative of violent acts, so definitions of violence are often couched as descriptions of events such as those in *Without Sanctuary*. The simplest way to define violence is to present or narrate imagery that encapsulates what an author wishes to reference. Although not comprehensive, this chapter is devoted to more precisely defining violence; therefore, what follows is an effort to define the term violence for the purposes of this dissertation.[14] When I use the word violence, I am referring to something very specific, and that specificity is revealed in the following analysis.

As demonstrated above, the word violence is difficult to define. Articulated definitions of violence often deteriorate into a jumble of undifferentiated ideas, for example, vague references to power, strength, or force. Power, strength, and force, though, are not synonymous with violence, and confusing their relationship exemplifies the difficulty of defining violence. In the "Second Meditation" of René Descartes' *Meditations*, Descartes cautions against defining man as a rational animal since doing so generates two more questions, that is, what is rational and what is animal? Likewise, to define violence as an expression of power or a demonstration of strength generates two questions while failing to answer the first; what is violence? Unfortunately, according to

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[14] For example, there are a number of relevant differences between physical violence and psychological violence; however, since many realist strong violent moving images traffic in the representation of physical violence, interpersonal corporeal violence is the focus of my analysis. However, an important future project is to analyze the difference between the construction, depiction, and viewer experience/response to physical versus psychological violence.

Hannah Arendt in *On Violence*, this problem is symptomatic of the disappointing state of definitions of violence. In large part, this is a result of defining violence using similarly undefined or vague language; the symptom of unknowing or unwilling disciplines to confront the uncomfortable dialogue required to understand and thus define violence.

To her credit, Arendt demonstrates how to distinguish between power, strength, and violence. She writes, "power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together."[15] Contrary to being synonyms, power and strength dwell in different realms. While violence is often present during expressions of power, violence will always dominate power. According to Arendt, to be in power or powerful is to be supported or propped up by a large contingency. However, once that group dissolves or is confronted with violence, unless they individually and as a group are willing to be violent themselves, violence will always destroy power. For example, a large peaceful protest gains a certain power as it gains members, but the violence from a single gunshot can separate the group and thus dissolve or weaken the power of the group, but also the power of the group to support each other. Interestingly, Arendt asserts that although violence always trumps power, power is never created by violence since what arises from the solitary gunshot is not true power but only the immediate domination of violence over power. For Arendt, there is a difference between individuals that inflict violence and the power of the individual to form a collective and the power of the collective itself, and this power of the individual is further distinguished from the strength of the individual.

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[15] Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (Orlando, Florida: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1970), 41.

Strength, in contrast to power, is singular to the individual, but strength is easily and frequently overpowered by the many. The term force might be closer to violence, but force for Arendt is reserved for forces of nature. Violence implies an authority, but authority is derived from mutual respect in complex interrelationships, which is undermined very easily by abuses of power or strength. Authority is granted or vested and remains only as long as it is recognized. Another group of peaceful protesters might confiscate authority by denying the state's authority to control their presence and in the process reveal that a policeperson's authority derives only from the ability to inflict violence and not from real power, strength, or authority. As such, violence, for Arendt, is not synonymous with power, strength, force, or authority, although such language is typically conjured up by and associated with violence. Violence, for Arendt, is instrumental; violence multiples natural strength. Evidently, while Arendt offers little in terms of a rigid definition of violence, her attempt to disentangle the language surrounding superficial definitions of violence should be lauded. All this is to demonstrate the extreme difficulty of defining violence. However, a critique can be leveled against philosophy itself for failing to understand violence appropriately. While analysis and definition are the milieu of philosophy, philosophy may have inadvertently failed when it comes to defining violence.

In "Philosophy and its Other—Violence: A Survey of Philosophical Repression from Plato to Girard," Tobin Siebers takes philosophy to task for failing to understand violence. Siebers condemns philosophy as oppressive of violence, sucking the violence out of violence, so to speak. In other words, philosophy turns violence, as it generally

does with many concepts, into an idea not a tangible phenomenon. For example, Georges Sorel's *Reflections on Violence* and Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* both adeptly and profoundly write about violence in relation to social progress and revolution, but while lucid and relevant, the approach removes or reframes violence as different from violence per se. Violence becomes an instrument, in Arendt's sense, but also the manifestation of an idea or desire. Similar accounts mistakenly resituate violence in the metaphysical or non-physical world. The error is not egregious, but a discussion or analysis of violence should be grounded in the physical realm that violence inhabits. It is real harm that violence causes, even in the name of ideas and concepts such as justice, freedom, or autonomy. Again, though, this is the dilemma in talking about a concept that is more act than thought. In fact, it would be altogether easier to perform violence than to define it.

Violence itself seems not so difficult. Although precision and skill is necessary to carefully implode a longstanding building, the same outcome can be accomplished with a much sloppier technique. Violence has this paradoxical nature which makes it difficult to articulate. Cutting into flesh is violent when it occurs in a dark alley, by surprise, to take a life. Cutting into flesh is not violent when it occurs in a bright sterile operating room, with careful planning and precision, to save a life. Violence, then, seems to be sortally generated. Given certain conditions, intentions, and consequences, a seemingly similar act can be violent and non-violent. Monroe C. Beardsley defines sortal generation as "the act-generation that occurs when an action of one sort becomes also (under the requisite conditions) an action of another sort – without, of course, ceasing to be an action of the

first sort as well."[16] Beardsley uses sortal generation, in contrast to causal generation, to explain how bodily motions and pausings become the movings and posings of dance. Beardsley continues by proffering that what turns movements into dance is the intense volitional qualities of motions coupled with an expressiveness and suggestiveness that generates dance rather than practical action. Applying Beardsley's notion of sortal generation, it seems given the appropriate tool and an appetite for power one can easily generate violence.

In one sense, then, physical interpersonal violence demands very little in the sense of performing simple actions with an added instrument and intention of violence. Yet in another sense it demands all we have in the sense of destroying a world. The same can be said of viewing and discussing violence. However, committing violence and discussing violence are drastically different undertakings. I can punch, kick, or slap rather haphazardly anytime I wish, but discussing violence in a meaningful way entails taking time to unravel a complex web of social and historical assumptions and norms. There is, in the general consciousness, a constructed meaning of violence that is in many ways ineffable, or at the least indefinable in brief. Violence, the word in print, the letters on a page, and the sounds of its utterance is translated, imagined, and transformed into so much more.

Again, as a sign signifying something, the word violence indicates nothing specific or distinct. As a signifier, the word violence functions well enough to mark a

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[16] Monroe C. Beardsley, "What Is Going on in a Dance?" *Dance Research Journal* 15 (1982): 32.

certain vague notion of harm, pain, and injustice. As such, violence as a signifier is superficially clear, but the signified concept is more often than not fuzzy. Qualifiers such as graphic, strong, or intense can be attached to violence, as in, graphic violence, strong violence, and intense violence, but really these grammatical adjustments provide little in the way of clarification when we ask just what is being referenced. A common quick solution is to tell a vivid story or to figuratively or literally point at some imagery to indicate what is meant, but that skirts the issue of this and subsequent chapters. Although examples are good as far as they go, they only get us so far toward articulating such a widely used yet often indeterminate concept. There is absolutely a relationship or bond[17] between the word violence and a vague concept or image that comes to mind when we discuss violence in general terms, but in an effort for more clarity and a deeper understanding of violence, we need to work on defining violence. At the very least what I hope to accomplish in this chapter is to begin to make clear what I mean when I use the word violence and in particular violent moving images. Therefore, the next problem of an aesthetics of violent moving images is to define violent moving images.

<div align="center">Defining Violent Moving Images</div>

The fourth problem of an aesthetics of violent moving images is to define a type of violent media I call violent moving images. Initially, it is sufficient to distinguish violent moving images by their ontological status, but later it becomes important to distinguish violent moving images by their propositional content, that is, the subject or essential or primary idea or theme being offered for viewing by these moving images.

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[17] As Ferdinand de Saussure calls it in his *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Roy Harris (Illinois: Open Court Publishing, 1983).

While this seems theoretically and analytically complex, a lot of the work of unpacking what distinguishes and defines violent moving images is already done, and what follows is a summary of the relevant work and its application to violent moving images. Of course, this represents only a portion of the refinement necessary to get to what will eventually be described as realist strong violent moving images. However, the work needs to be done because this dissertation is confronting and attempting to overcome the common misconception that violence, in all its manifestations, is already understood. That is, that we already know what violence is, what the appeal of watching violence is, and thus what causes violent behavior: the conception that something essential inheres in all acts, expressions, or representations of violence. Such a misconception is counterintuitive and counter productive to more profoundly understanding the essential features and ultimate allure of violent moving images; an understanding that begins with recognizing the wide range of violent moving images.

First, then, the ontological status of violent moving images necessitates definition. Violent moving images are distinguished not just by their ontological status and propositional content, but also by their ostensible constitution. The ostensible constitution of violent moving images is the asserted essential features or qualities different kinds of violent moving images present to credulous audiences that are meant to be accepted as truth. However, before unpacking the variegated essential features of violent moving images, it is first necessary to clarify the ontological status of moving images.

Before I develop a preliminary definition of the word violence, it is first necessary to make sense of what type of imagery is being referenced; that is, what exactly are violent moving images as distinct from violent etchings, paintings, photographs, or plays? For example, while the photographs from *Without Sanctuary* are violent, or maybe only imbued or reminiscent of violence, they are not moving images. Of course, in saying this I am not claiming that a collection of lynching photographs is not violent enough to be worthy of analysis and discussion, but presently such imagery is not produced and provided as popular entertainment or consumed in massive quantities without reflection or some educational goal. Still, how are current violent moving images, such as streaming videos of public executions or lynchings, different from the photographic images in *Without Sanctuary*? Are these not just static images, like photographs, spliced or linked together? What initially distinguishes violent moving images from other types of violent imagery is that they are moving images, and this is different from piecing together the violent etchings from Francisco Goya's *Disasters of War* and somehow setting them in motion. What, then, is the difference; what is a moving image? An excellent answer to this question is provided in Noël Carroll's *Theorizing the Moving Image*.

In an effort to refute the tendency to extend the theories that underlie photographic realism to film, Carroll identifies five necessary conditions for something to be called a moving image, and these conditions differentiate moving images from etchings, paintings, photographs, plays, and other visual representations and presentations of violence. The five conditions are: first, something is a moving image only if it is a

detached display; second, something is a moving image only if it belongs to the class of things from which the impression of movement is technically possible; third, something is a moving image only if performance tokens of it are generated by a template that is a token; fourth, something is a moving image only if performance tokens of it are not artworks in their own right; fifth, something is a moving image only if it is two-dimensional.[18] While all the above conditions help distinguish moving images from static images such as paintings and photographs, and moving images from real live events, conditions one and five are the most pertinent to differentiating moving images from other types of imagery or visual spectacles.

Condition one challenges the notion of transparency in photographic realism; the idea that photographs, and by extension film, are simply windows. Since you cannot physically orient yourself to photographs and films in the same way you could at a live event, even if utilizing a prosthetic device such as glasses, binoculars, or a telescope, photographs, and thus film, in virtue of being detached displays, are not transparent windows to the world.[19] Condition five allows us to quickly distinguish violent moving images from real live violent events. Since real live violent events necessitate the lived body, two-dimensionality is impossible, and therefore we can easily draw a speedy but strong delineation between real live violent events and various kinds of violent moving images.

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[18] Adapted from Noël Carroll, *Theorizing the Moving Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 70.

[19] This misconception will reappear in Chapter 2's discussion of how indexical violent moving images create a mediated presence that tricks its audience into assuming transparency.

Ultimately, the ontological status of violent moving images, in contrast to static violent imagery or other visual representations of violence, is that of moving images which are by definition detached displays and two-dimensional. Additionally, though, violent moving images are distinguished by their propositional content, that is, the subject or essential or primary idea or theme being offered for viewing by these moving images. This might seem a repetitive or unnecessary question to explore, but again this is where the mistake of assuming an understanding of a commonly used, yet commonly vague, notion of violence might cause confusion. More simply, what follows is defining what violent moving images are about.

Undeniably, perceptions and definitions of violence vary widely between individuals even if a common understanding courses unarticulated within our social consciousness. Sometimes, violence is demarcated by the presence of vehement feelings or expressions of an extreme force or sudden, intense, and powerful activity. However, when the word violence is used in everyday conversation more is meant than what is contained in the former definition: illegitimacy, horrible, unpleasant, offensive, and often tangible physical hurt are implied. Below, I will fully develop a definition or description of a type of violent moving image called strong violent moving images, but at this point it is sufficient to say that when I use the term violence or violent moving images I always mean imagery that depicts violence in a brutal and visceral form. While violence could be defined as a forceful brushstroke on canvas or a particularly powerful dance movement, at this stage in the dissertation violence refers to physical violence, in

particular, realistically depicted or actual documentation of bludgeoning, rape, death, or murder.

While underdeveloped and overly broad, it is necessary for preliminary progress to assume a common understanding and definition of the term violence. The following definition by Mary Jackman will work well for now. So, violent moving images portray or represent "actions that inflict, threaten, or cause injury. Actions may be corporal…or verbal. Injuries may be corporal, psychological, material, or social."[20] Thus, the propositional content of violent moving images is violence that takes the form of any of the actions and injuries broadly defined above. Again, though, this definition will take us only so far, and will be refined throughout this and subsequent chapters.

At present, though, it is unnecessary to draw out a distinction between violent moving images and non-violent moving images; for example, comedic, dramatic, or romantic moving images. This is because I am concerned here with the content contained within the boundaries of the violent moving image per se. Violent propositional content may occur within any genre, or be the general focus of a genre, for example, slasher films. More clearly, what distinguishes violent moving images from non-violent moving images is that the former contain violence, are about violence, or make violence a central feature of the imagery. What will become apparent is that the continuum of violent moving images developed in Chapter 2 is meant to distinguish types of violent moving images from each other, not violent moving images from dramatic moving images, romantic moving images, and so forth.

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[20] Mary R. Jackman, "Violence in Social Life," *Annual Review of Sociology* 28 (2002): 388.

While the analysis of the ontological status of violent moving images simplifies Carroll's work, it is sufficient to differentiate violent moving images from violent photographs, violent performances, and real live violent spectacles. However, the propositional content of violent moving images remains overly broad. This project assumes a working definition of moving images, but must further refine the notion of violence. The fifth problem of an aesthetics of violent moving images is detailing the essential features of a type of violent moving images which contain a kind of violence called strong violence. Strong violent moving images afford a unique phenomenological experience that enables moral contemplation and possibly results in shifts in moral perspective to a degree not afforded by other types of violent moving images.

Defining Strong Violent Moving Images

Clarifying the essential features of strong violent moving images is the fifth hurdle to an aesthetics of violent moving images. That violence is difficult to define is evident by the ambiguous nature of the colloquial use of the word violence. Violence in common usage is almost infinitely variegated. A powerful red brush stroke on canvas can be violent, a conductor's vigorous movements toward an orchestra can be violent, a large loud protest can be, and be about, peace and violence, a novel idea in a certain time and place can be violent, and a crashing thunderstorm can be violent. Equally vague are academic or scientific definitions of violence derived from the social sciences or humanities. Similarly, though well intentioned, philosophical conceptions of violence seem to define violence without capturing the essence or phenomenon of violence per se.

In order to further clarify violent moving images, the spirit of violence, at least as implied in this dissertation, must be articulated.

In "Violence: The Strong and the Weak," Devin McKinney commendably divides violent moving images into two parts: the strong and the weak. According to Devin McKinney, "strong violence enables-and often entails-shifts in one's moral position. This is part of its power, and a great deal of its threat."[21] Violent moving images of strong violence, even with fictional characters or events, afford spectators profound self-reflective contemplation. Affording profound self-reflective contemplation is a preliminary feature that may help distinguish two types of violent moving images. McKinney seems to imply that strong violence generally and consistently generates shifts in moral position; however, it seems pertinent to refrain from such overstatements and instead understand strong violence as affording the strong probability or possibility of shifts in viewer's moral positions as one possible result of profound self-reflective contemplation. Strong violence enables but does not necessarily entail shifts in one's moral position.

A myriad of factors affect the viewing experience that cannot be underestimated no matter the potential power of strong violence. For example, a group of students taken to view Steven Spielberg's holocaust film *Schindler's List* laughed so much during the film that they were asked to leave the theater. When questioned, the students responded

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[21] Devin McKinney, "Violence: The Strong and the Weak," *Screening Violence*, ed. Stephen Prince (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 106. It is important to note that neither McKinney nor I understand strong and weak as designations of scale. There are not greater and lesser degrees of strong and weak violent moving images; rather, violent moving images are either strong or weak, and are so in virtue of whether they do or do not succeed in affording shifts in moral perspective.

that their laughter was directed at the odd way in which an executed character's body fell and slumped to the ground, not a response to the serious content and overall message of the film.[22] Nevertheless, the strong violent moving images of *Schindler's List* failed to shift the moral positions of some of its viewers, but it is also entirely possible that a subsequent viewing of the film at a later time might afford such a profound response to the same students as it did for many other viewers. By affording a unique experiential response, strong violent moving images represent a special type of violent imagery.

Besides the preliminary qualities and conditions mentioned above, and the opportunity they afford for profound self-reflective contemplation, strong violent moving images are particularly unique and moving because of the type of violence they contain. In other words, it is a collection of conditions that coalesce to represent a specific type of violence, and it is this violence that enables deep reflective thought and the potential for shifts in moral positions. Before analyzing contemporary theories that proffer why and how this occurs, it is important to dissect and explicate the unique portrayal of violence in strong violent moving images: interpersonal corporeal violence.

Strong violence is at its core interpersonal and corporeal. Earlier, philosophy was accused of resituating that which inheres in the physical realm into ideas of the metaphysical.[23] My account of interpersonal corporeal violence attempts to remedy or address this critique. Interpersonal corporeal violence is the most visceral, horrific, and

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[22] Christine Spolar, "The Kids Who Laughed Till it Hurt," *Washington Post*, March 10, 1994, C1, C4.

[23] Tobin Siebers argues in "Philosophy and its Other—Violence: A Survey of Philosophical Repression from Plato to Girard," *Anthropoetics - The Electronic Journal of Generative Anthropology* Volume I, number 2 (December, 1995).

worrisome form of violence and it is possibly for these reasons that it is easier to transform it into notions of power, strength, or force. Not trivially, it is simply easier to discuss power instead of rape, strength instead of murder, or force instead of death. It is unpleasant to watch and discuss violence since it requires confronting our deepest fears, and as Plato and others argue, our deepest desires. However, strong violence is fundamentally about connections in the lived world, and so to not talk about it in terms of interpersonal relationships and body to body confrontations is to understand only half the phenomenon.

To that end, instead of defining strong violence in a reference sort of way, it is best to put a face on strong violence in the sense of elucidating its essential features. A face is made up of certain essential parts, but we do not say the face is merely the front of the head but many variations of features such as a nose, mouth, and eyes. Likewise, we can describe strong violence in terms of its essential features. These would then become necessary features of realist strong violent moving images. In addition to being moving images that afford profound self-reflective contemplation, the violence in strong violent moving images embodies at least the following nine features of interpersonal corporeal violence.

First, strong violent moving images portray violence as generating pain and suffering. In *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry says the suffering and pain of others is often ineffable.[24] However, pain and suffering are at the core of strong violence. Strong violent moving images must break this ineffability by conveying pain and suffering if

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[24] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 3-4.

only through screams of agony or groans of torment. Strong violent moving images must

take what is private and inherently subjective and make it obvious, explicit, and

accessible. In the Cartesian sense, strong violent moving images contain either inner or

outer pain and suffering. While there is absolutely a distinction between inner (mental)

and outer (bodily) pain and suffering, strong violent moving images must somehow

convey or manifest inner pain and suffering on screen in such a way that it is visible,

recognizable, and understood. The phenomenological experience of pain is subjective,

but the recognition of another's pain and suffering is relatively well known. Screaming,

writhing, or other self-reports of internal states, coupled with outer visible proof of bodily

injury serve as reliable evidence of pain and suffering. It is the accurate and authentic

representation of pain and suffering combined with ease of recognition of pain and

suffering on the part of the viewer that is necessary to achieve strong violent moving

images.[25] Strong violent moving images are essential about pain and suffering.

Second, strong violent moving images portray violence as the result of agent-

based intentionality. In "Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind" John Searle

distinguishes between a prior intention and intention-in-action. The former involves

deliberation and premeditation, the latter being more akin to volition and dependent on

local world conditions to be successful.[26] While not discounting the role of prior

intention, strong violent moving images are primarily intention-in-action according to

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[25] This is of recognition is another reason this dissertation focuses on physical violence as opposed to psychological violence.

[26] John Searle, *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1983).

Searle's account. Implicit in strong violent moving images being intentional is also that

strong violence is agent-based. Therefore, the accidental car crash, the accidental

explosion, and the accidental fall are not instances of strong violent moving images no

matter the degree of pain and suffering involved. Further, natural events, as lacking

conscious minds capable of intentionality, would be excluded from conveying a sense of

strong violence and thus lacking the ability for viewers to deeply reflect on the violence

they are watching. Since true accidents and natural disasters are rarely assigned

culpability or moral blame, it makes sense that strong violence that enables shifts in

moral positions must contribute or make available moral judgments on the part of the

viewer. Strong violent moving images are essentially intentional.

Third, strong violent moving images portray violence as naturalized. While

Leontius' appetite to view the macabre is best understood as inborn, strong violent

moving images portray the actual act or motivations for violence as natural. That is,

violence is portrayed as the expression of an innate urge to be violent; an urge that needs

merely a moment to be let loose to wreak havoc. In *Foundations of Violence*, Grace M.

Jantzen attempts to denaturalize death. In other words, Jantzen argues that violence is not

an essential and natural part of the human condition. Attacking psychoanalytic and

biological naturalizing accounts of what Jantzen calls necrophilia – "an obsession with

death and violence"[27] – Jantzen draws upon Michel Foucault to denaturalize death.

Jantzen has a convincing argument, but her contrast only serves to clarify the different

way in which violence is portrayed in strong violent moving images. If portrayed and

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[27] Grace M. Jantzen, *Foundations of Violence* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 21.

then seen by viewers as natural, innate, and symptomatic of the human condition, strong

violent moving images confront the viewer with their own potential for violence and their

own vulnerability to the violence of others. This realization requires contemplation and

reflection. Strong violent moving images are essentially naturalized.

Fourth, strong violent moving images portray violence as having speed or

rapidity. Movie montages typically speed up time, but violent montages often slow down

time in order to remind us of the speed with which bodies are being injured. However, it

is not speed simpliciter, but rather the speed at which the stakes of an event are raised that

produces the power of strong violent moving images. This is true of interpersonal

corporeal violence as well as political violence.

> A situation or event is violent to the extent that a sudden and drastic
> increase occurs in the scale of negative values at stake. The more drastic
> and rapid the increase, the more negative, and the more people who
> experience this increase, the more violent is the situation or event.[28]

I disagree with the amplification of violence based on the quantity of people involved,

nevertheless, the notion of speed or rapidity seems essential to strong violent moving

images' unique phenomenological effect. Strong violent moving images are essentially

rapid.

Fifth, strong violent moving images portray violence as uncertain. While speed is

a key feature of strong violent moving images, I would like to further refine the notion by

qualifying speed and rapidity as also having degrees of uncertainty. Speedy violence is a

common characteristic of blockbuster action movies, but it is not the quick death that is

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[28] Ian S. Lustick, "Defining Violence: A Plausability Probe Using Agent-Based Modeling" (n.p.: n.p, n.d), 6.

transformative or indicative of strong violent moving images. It is the uncertainty of the outcome of violence to viewer, agent, and witness that is of paramount importance. "The essence of what distinguishes unpleasant or unfortunate encounters that are not violent from those that are is the sense, on the part of the observer (whether victim or not) that enormous uncertainty about what might be about to be lost is compressed into a small space of time."[29] Lustick seems to be hinting at the earlier idea that violence is sortally generated, but the thrust of the point is clear: the more uncertain the outcome, the more violent and affective the violence. Strong violent moving images are essentially uncertain.

Sixth, strong violent moving images portray violence as utterly destructive and ruinous. One of the most important aspects about the type of violent moving images discussed throughout the rest of this dissertation is that it is imagery that portrays violence as destructive or ruinous to its core. The relationship between violence and destruction will be explicated further in Chapter 5, but the emphasis is that far from representing merely a scratch or even a peaceful death, interpersonal corporeal violence completely alters the world of the agent, victim, and witness of violence. Drawing on Scarry again, violence, in particular torture, unmakes our world. The body in pain or attacked by violence is tied to an identity, which is based on the ability to communicate, take up space, and have a certain form. Strong violence destroys language, cuts down spatial presence, and ruins corporeal form. As such, violence destroys both identities and worlds. The phenomenology of interacting with the profundity of this realization and

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[29]Ibid. 19

experience will be further explored in Chapters 3, 4, and 5. However, it is sufficient to

say that the experience is profound and elucidative to the viewer. Strong violent moving

images are essentially destructive and ruinous.

Seventh, strong violent moving images portray violence as anti-technological.

Strong violent moving images are interpersonal violence premised upon human

connections. In many ways technology brings people together by shortening distances,

erasing boundaries, and overall freeing interaction. In contrast, technological

advancements in weapons and methods of violence, for good or bad, separates people

from each other's humanity. In terms of violence, the greater the degree of technology,

the greater the difficulty in recognizing the humanity of those harmed by violence. In

Phillip Noyce's film adaptation of Tom Clancy's *Patriot Games*, the United States uses

high tech satellites and video imaging to stealthily wipe out a terrorist training camp. As

spectators far from the actual battlefield, one onlooker calmly observes "that is a kill."[30]

Years later, actual Apache helicopter night vision attacks that mirror the fictional movie

scenes have become popular viral videos on the internet. The use of technology for

violence allows agents and witnesses of violence to distance themselves from acts of

violence and destruction. Viewing strong violent moving images is about learning the

confines, limitations, and abilities of one's own body. Technology severs that connection

in reality and fiction, and therefore severs the opportunity to contemplate those realities

when violence is portrayed as a result of greater and greater degrees of technological

involvement. Strong violent moving images must be visceral in the sense that they affect

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[30] Director Phillip Noyce, *Patriot Games*, Writer Tom Clancy, Screen Play W. Peter Illif, and Donald Stewart, Paramount Pictures, 1992.

inward feelings. Technology allows a distancing between the agent of violence, the victim of violence, and the witness to violence. As such, technology distances the viewer of strong violent moving images from acknowledging this reality. Interpersonal corporeal violence is violence that eschews technology or arises and sustains some connection to base emotions and emphasizes a close proximate connection to the victim. In contrast, technological violence leaves audiences disinterested and disconnected. As McKinney says, strong violence "leaves an audience feeling dead inside, yet, somehow, more alive than it was."[31] Strong violent moving images are essentially anti-technological.

Eighth, strong violent moving images portray violence as between bodies or organic extensions of bodies. Besides being interpersonal, strong violent moving images must be corporeal in nature. Above, Arendt identified violence as instrumental in the sense that it is the instrument of power, insecurity, or politics, but violence is also performed utilizing instruments. At its basest, violence is performed to and by human bodies as instruments and targets of violence. Interpersonal corporeal violence is about intentionally physically injuring another human being using the body or an organic extension of the body. Pushing a button to launch a nuclear missile is not the same as pulling a stranger close and stabbing him or her with a knife. The former instance of violence is wholly separated from any substantial human connection while the latter, although still instrumental, is representative of an instrument of violence that becomes an organic extension of the body of the agent of violence. Shifts in moral position cannot be

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[31] Devin McKinney, "Violence: The Strong and the Weak," *Screening Violence*, ed. Stephen Prince (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 106.

achieved by portrayals of violence that fail to elucidate and foster an interconnectedness between agents, victims, and witnesses of violence. Strong violent moving images are essentially corporeal or organic corporeal extension.

Ninth, strong violent moving images portray violence as involving blood, bone, organs, or flesh. It is not just the visible body that enables a profound response to corporeal harm, but also what violence to the body reveals. An aesthetics of violent moving images cannot neglect a discussion of blood, bones, organs, and flesh. Interpersonal corporeal violence must involve a playing with or acute awareness of the materiality that constitutes body identity. The stuff of bodies is often understood as so much more than mere parts, but a unity or unified structure with a teleological purpose. Organs connote power and strength; however, organs also symbolize tools, tools or machines that keep us alive, and when these machines are shown broken, battered, or exposed to the harsh world viewers cannot help but feel the weakness of such precious instruments and become concerned for the victim of harm by recognizing the correlate of the onscreen body as mirroring the attributes of their own body. Similarly, flesh represents a shared universal humanity, but also a shared strength and weakness. Flesh is the first thing that protects us from the world and the easiest thing to damage. Such realizations and juxtapositions force profound contemplation, and it is corporeal violence, not the violence of an exploding car, that motivates or catalyzes deeper reflections about violence. Strong violent moving images are essentially blood, bone, organs, and flesh.

Strong violent moving images are necessarily interpersonal and corporeal. Interpersonal corporeal violence is essentially violence about tangible and extreme pain

and suffering, agent based intentionality, naturalized appetites, speed and rapidity, degrees of uncertainty, utter destruction and ruin, eschewing technology, and the body. These nine features describe the essential constitution of interpersonal corporeal violence, and become the foundation of a definition of strong violent moving images.[32]

Conclusion

The problem of an aesthetics of violent moving images is multifaceted. In Chapter 1 I have made progress at refining if not defining a type of violent media called strong violent moving images. First, I defined moving images followed by an initial whittling down of the notion of violence. Second, a type of violent moving images called strong violent moving images was defined. Strong violent moving images allow for profound self-reflective contemplation and possible shifts in moral position as a result of being moving images of interpersonal corporeal violence. Interpersonal corporeal violence is essentially violence that is intentional, naturalized, anti-technological, and uncertain, and is about pain and suffering, destruction and ruin, and the body. The exegesis above provides a common foundation to begin to understand the variegated nature of violent moving images. However, the final problem to address is the limitation of the methodology utilized above.

Although successful at narrowing down a type of violent moving imagery, it seems to aim at strictly categorizing what is an ever changing landscape of violent media. The analysis works to more fully articulate the type of violence I wish to discuss in subsequent chapters, but it lacks in revealing the relationship between other types of

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[32] With slight alterations that de-emphasize the body, it becomes clear how a definition and analysis of psychological violence could be developed using many similar essential features.

violent moving images and thus ultimately a more profound understanding of violent moving images. Further, even the relatively narrowly defined strong violent moving images constitute a daunting amount of content. Adequately analyzing the large canon of strong violent moving images would be cursory at best.

Therefore, the next step is to situate various types of violent moving images on a continuum to avoid losing perspective on the context in which strong violent moving images inhere, but also to avoid generalizations. In doing so, the allure of strong violent moving images becomes increasingly specific and elucidative. In Chapter 2, then, I shall develop a continuum of violent moving images to correctly situate various types of violent moving images in relation to each other and to real live violent events. Specifically, the continuum creates or refines descriptions or definitions of indexical, realist, iconic, and symbolic violent moving images which themselves contain their own malleable continuums and vague imbrications. A continuum of violent moving images will group together a certain phenomena or type of violent moving imagery, realist strong violent moving images, which will then allow for greater depth of analysis, explanatory strength, and understanding of the aesthetics of violent moving images, and ultimately the allure of viewing violence.

CHAPTER 2

A CONTINUUM OF VIOLENT MOVING IMAGES

Sketching a Continuum of Violent Moving Images

In an effort to begin to understand the allure of a certain type of strong violent moving images, I will adapt a continuum of violent media from Gwyn Symonds' *The Aesthetics of Violence in Contemporary Media*. While Symonds' overall analysis has flaws, the methodology and finished project work better than other approaches which generalize too much from individual examples or go nowhere beyond an individual film or scene.[1] Using Symonds' method will help further focus this dissertation's analysis, and reveal what will and will not be discussed throughout the remaining chapters. Additionally, it will group together an even more specific phenomena or type of strong violent moving images, realist strong violent moving images, which will then allow for greater depth of analysis, explanatory strength, and understanding of the allure of realist strong violent moving images.

Initially, a continuum of violent moving images must reference some objective reality or real live violent event. Ultimately, violent moving images reflect to various degrees the physical and visual reality of actual violence. Therefore, just outside the continuum are real live violent events. For example, the photographic and written accounts of Jessie Washington's lynching reference real violence in the sense that the violent event did at one time happen to a real person, in real time, in a real place;

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[1] This is generally the case in sociology, communication studies, and film studies. For example, while *Screening Violence* by Stephen Prince provides valuable insights into specific films or artists, for example Sam Peckinpah, there is very little effort to move beyond an individual film or director, and any extrapolation might be unjustified.

Washington's lynching was a real live violent event for many spectators. It is unnecessary, I think, to be overly specific with what I mean by real or that Jessie's lynching, during its occurrence, was a real live violent event. What is important is that from this starting point of the real live violent event, the continuum begins. A continuum of violent moving images can be represented as looking something like this:

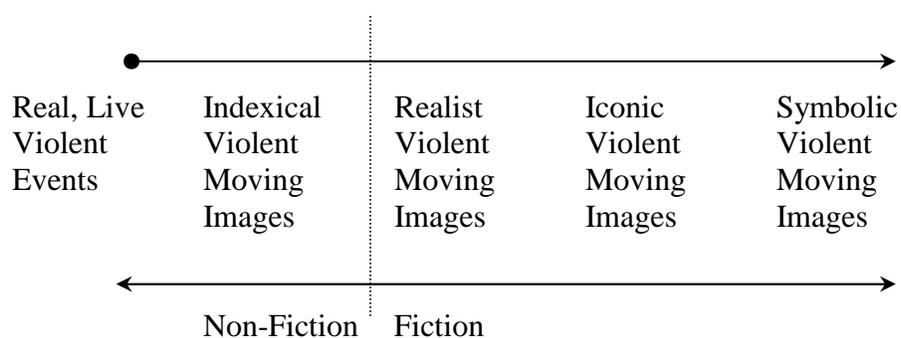| Real, Live Violent Events	Indexical Violent Moving Images	Realist Violent Moving Images	Iconic Violent Moving Images	Symbolic Violent Moving Images

Non-Fiction | Fiction

Figure 1: A Continuum of Violent Moving Images

As the violent moving images on the continuum distance themselves from the real live event, they become less and less representative of real violence and more and more mediated. For example, symbolic violent moving images have almost none of the raw feel or references to a real live violent event, in fact, maybe no traces of the real are represented in symbolic violent moving imagery. While this dissertation will focus on the complex and controversial realist violent moving images, it is first necessary to define loose categories of violent moving images in order to elucidate what distinguishes the different kinds of violent moving images. To note, it is the ostensible constitution of indexical violent moving images that will delineate this first stop on the continuum. In

other words, it is the asserted but unwarranted nature of indexical violent moving images communicated to the audience that proffers dubious truths about the essential qualities of the imagery that largely determines what an indexical violent moving image is in contrast to a real live violent event. Chapter 2 will then further define and clarify why realist violent moving images, and their unique essential features, require special attention and understanding.

<center>Indexical Violent Moving Images</center>

On January 22, 1987 Pennsylvania State Treasurer Robert Budd Dwyer, facing a lengthy sentence for a bribery conviction, called a press conference.[2] After reading a prepared statement, Dwyer pulled a large pistol from a manila envelope, put the barrel of the gun into his mouth, and, despite pleas from the audience that had gathered, pulled the trigger committing suicide.[3] That day, local schools were closed because of snow, the press conference was being broadcast live on a number of television channels, and countless children saw Budd Dwyer kill himself and his head gush blood as it slumped against the wall behind his podium. Press conference attendees, journalists, colleagues, and family, watched a real live violent event and those at home; parents, children, and friends, watched an indexical violent moving image.

Indexical violent moving images are best described as mediated re-presentations, but this description clashes with their ostensible constitution. In contrast to their status as

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[2] "Pennsylvania Official's Suicide May Be Linked to Finances," *The Washington Post*, January 24, 1987.

[3] Scott McCabe, "Crime History: PA state Treasurer kills self on live TV," *Washington State Examiner*, January 22, 2010.

mediated re-presentations, indexical violent moving images proffer their propositional

content as transparent presentations, that is, the ostensible constitution of indexical

violent moving images proposes transparency as an essential feature of indexical violent

moving images. Further, the quality of transparency offered by indexical violent moving

images is one that audiences are meant to believe almost unquestioningly. Understanding

indexical violent moving images as lucid unequivocal presentations continues to gain

popular acceptance because mediatization legitimizes an objectivity and transparency that

is simply not accessible from indexical violent moving images. Transparency, though, is

the ostensible constitution of indexical violent moving images, and it is our obligation to

clarify why indexical violent moving images are incorrectly perceived of as having this

feature, and to clarify how and why indexical violent moving images should be

understood as distinct from real live violent events.[4] In fact, indexical violent moving

images should be understood as not only ontologically distinct from real live violent

events in virtue of the arguments outlined above, but also as phenomenologically and

epistemologically different from what they re-present. Analyzing the more subtle and

obscure differences between real live violent events and indexical moving images can

elucidate such distinctions.

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[4] A strong distinction between real live violent events and indexical violent moving images is required to avoid the trap of analyzing only actual violence. If no large distinction exists, then there is also less evidence to suggest there is a substantial difference between watching real live violent events and re-presentations or representations of violence. I argue that there is a very distinct and important difference, although an analysis of the allure of viewing real live violent events is also a future project that would provide valuable insight into understanding actual violence.

Indexical violent moving images succeed in turning their ostensible constitution of unmediated re-presentations into firm audience belief by denying their own ontological status as mediated re-presentations. Interestingly, this is accomplished through reinforcing their mediatization at every moment. Indexical violent moving images are wrapped in a commonly accepted symbolic encoding, which is subsequently unpacked so rapidly by spectators that today the absence of mediatization distinguishes itself more by its absence than its presence. By utilizing contemporary communication techniques, indexical violent moving images reinforce socially accepted mediatization and have gained acceptance as evidential records. Indexical violent moving images have become perceived evidence of the lived experience, but while they may provide relatively reliable evidence of real live violent events, spectators frequently overlook the amount of mediatization indexical moving images contain, and thus also come to accept a false transparency. However, to intermingle the essential qualities of real live violent events and indexical violent moving images is to fail to profoundly explore the allure of such violent displays.

To that end, besides the ontological condition of being moving images that are detached and two-dimensional, indexical violent moving images can be understood as different from real live violent events in virtue of two important conditions. First, indexical violent moving images have a distinct phenomenological condition by which the extension of natural human communication creates a metaphysical presence and thus the impression of a live experience. Second, indexical violent moving images have an epistemological condition by which evidential records are created that is granted an

illegitimate explanatory strength. Ultimately, these conditions are a function of the transformative nature and power of media technology and the manner in which mediatization shapes indexical violent moving images.

What follows below is an effort to analyze these conditions of mediated presence and mediated records to see how they manifest themselves in two types of indexical violent moving images; the fully live violent moving image and the moving image of the presumptive trace. Finally, it is relevant to reveal the necessity of the continuum of violent moving images by addressing a possible objection to the distinctions developed below, and then demonstrating why all violent moving images cannot fit neatly into strict categories. This last step is an exploration of the moving image of presumptive assertion, an imbrication between indexical violent moving images and the next stop on the continuum, realist violent moving images.[5]

In the aftermath of Budd Dwyer's suicide, parents, educators and the local community were concerned for the emotional health of young unsuspecting viewers, and news programs struggled with how much or how little they would rebroadcast of Dwyer's death. At least in part, these concerns seemed to arise because of an odd consensus that the indexical violent moving images of Dwyer's suicide were sufficiently similar or even identical to viewing a real live violent event. As an instance of the fully

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[5] The terms "Presumptive Trace" and "Presumptive Assertion" are borrowed from Noël Carroll's "Fiction, Non-Fiction, and the Film of Presumptive Assertion: A Conceptual Analysis" in *Film Theory and Philosophy*, ed. Richard Allen and Murray Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 173-202.

live[6], the violent television images of Dwyer's suicide created a mediated presence. As such, for many, watching the video of Dwyer's death minutes, hours, or even years later is believed to be no different from being present at the real live violent event itself. This sentiment seems partially accurate, especially when deciding what children should and should not be allowed to watch, but the assumption is not entirely truthful. It is important, if not in the context of parental decisions, at least for this analysis and discussion, to distinguish between a real live violent event and an indexical violent moving image. One distinction is that indexical violent moving images resulting from various media technologies create a mediated presence which, though accepted as similar, is vastly different from actual physical presence even when viewing fully live, recorded live, or edited live violent moving images. What follows is an exegesis of this difference.

Ontological presence is a necessary condition for viewing a real live violent event. In other words, to watch and experience a live event means to be in the presence of the performing living bodies.[7] Therefore it is a mediated presence, or lack of actual physical presence, that distinguishes an indexical violent moving image from a real live violent event. The lived experience requires real ontological presence, and indexical violent moving images cannot satisfy this condition. Consequently, the young eyes watching cartoons and then suddenly Budd Dwyer's suicide, while absolutely affected in

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[6] The term "Fully Live" is borrowed from Jérôme Bourdon's "Live television is still alive: on television as an unfulfilled promise," *Media, Culture & Society* Vol. 22 No. 5 (2000): 531-556

[7] Adapted from Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993).

this way or that, saw an indexical violent moving image and did not experience the violence in the exact same phenomenological way they would have had they witnessed the live event first hand. Simply put, home viewers were not physically present at the real live violent press conference, and thus did not experience or see a real live violent event, they only watched something that pointed to or indexed the real event.

It is technology's power of extension that creates a false sense of presence and apparent transparency. Feelings of transparency and real presence occur because media grants the power to extend the "natural limits of human communication capacities"[8] in such a customary way that today its absence is more recognizable than its presence. Unfortunately, it is a system of conventions, and not media's transparency, that tricks us into believing that watching an indexical violent moving image is the same as being physically present at a real live violent event. Contemporary media contains a whole host of communication rules that when taken for granted reinforces the sense of transparency of indexical violent moving images. Interestingly, the semiotic function of media reinforces and denies this difference. Indexical violent moving images are encoded and formatted in such a way, and have been habituated for so long, that audiences see through the mediatization, not the images themselves. This transparent encoding serves to differentiate the phenomenological and epistemological qualities of the real live violent event from the indexical violent moving image. This difference, though, is not as prominent, or sometimes even visible, to the viewer accustomed to such media conventions.

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[8] Winfried Schultz, "Reconstructing Mediatization as an Analytic Concept," *European Journal of Communication* Vol. 19(1) (2004): 87-101.

Another way to understand the ontological difference between a real live violent event and an indexical violent moving image is condition one of Carroll's definition of the moving image: the detached display. An indexical violent moving image is detached from the real live violent event it re-presents. Audiences are unable to physically orient themselves to the indexical violent moving image in the same way they would if physically present at a real live violent event. However, our acclimation to mediatization creates a metaphysical mediated presence that enables the re-presentation to deny this lack of true transparency. Often, the fully live indexical violent moving image is the most susceptible to this type of confusion.

On September 11, 2001, the "Today" show's stars, editors, and producers had little understanding about what was occurring after a small plane seemed to accidentally crash into New York's World Trade Center. The indexical violent moving images of what is now known to be a terrorist attack were transmitted fully live, or virtually simultaneously, to home spectators consuming a whole host of imbedded, encoded, and formatted messages. Mediated presence, created by media's power of extension, ultimately conveyed a false transparency or sense of 'being there'. Again, the globally transmitted moving images of the Twin Towers collapsing is an indexical violent moving image, but it is through mediatization that our intuitions inform us that we are watching the events unfold before our very eyes. While this is true to a certain extent, the violent moving images are still touched by the now invisible hand of media and thus dissimilar from witnessing a real live violent event.

Again, the live broadcast of the events of September 11 contain newscaster speculation about the tragedy of a small plane accidentally crashing into the building; that is, until a second larger plane hits the other tower and a new narrative story begins to unfold. The whole experience is shaped by the presence of such narrative voices, and even the moments of silence without them. We now take for granted such commentary during police chases or weather storms, and might claim we tune them out, but they must be understood as coloring and shaping the experience of watching the violent moving images that captured the real live violent event. As such, these violent moving images do not, and can not, be ontologically similar or confer a similar phenomenological experience as would be granted by being present at ground zero. The fully live, however, is often as close as we get to many events without being there ourselves, and as such even understood as merely re-presenting instead of transparently presenting, indexical violent moving images become understood as basically 'the real'. This acceptance and denial of mediatization has created the odd phenomenon that indexical violent moving images are perceived of as more real than the real itself. Actual presence is an alien experience as evident from the reaction of first-hand witnesses on September 11 who proclaimed, "I couldn't believe it, it looked like a movie!" Indeed, indexical, realist, and symbolic violent moving images have become accepted as the standard for real live violence, and this is partly because we no longer make sufficient distinctions between the first gatekeepers of truth, indexical violent moving images.

If left unchallenged, we find ourselves turned around and cleverly tricked by indexical violent moving image which deny their own ostensible constitution as

transparent presentation by creating a mediated presence that is currently integrally

linked to the fully live viewing experience. Of course, we might say that even physical

presence entails the presence of signs, codes, and the use of technology. Philip

Auslander says none of these recent events are truly live since "live performance now

often incorporates mediatization to the degree that the live event itself is a product of

media technologies."[9] I agree with the closeness of the relationship, especially today,

between the mediated and the live, and the idea that the live could not have existed

without the mediatized,[10] but this reinforces my claim about the necessity to distinguish

between the real live violent event and the indexical violent moving image, not a reason

not to try. If we follow the slippery slope, we would say that mediatization, technological

or otherwise (theater screens, stages, lighting) were always present,[11] but this should not

take away from our ability to distinguish in meaningful ways between the live and the

indexical. However, if mediated presence seems an unsatisfying difference, there is a

second strong distinction we can point to that differentiates the real live violent event

from indexical violent moving images. Indexical violent moving images, unlike real live

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[9] Philip Auslander, *Liveness: performance in a mediatized culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 25.

[10] *"*The live and the mediatized exist in a relation of mutual dependence and imbrication, not one of opposition. The live is, in a sense, only a secondary effect of mediating technologies." Philip Auslander, "Liveness, Performance, and the anxiety of simulation," in Elin Diamond ed. *Performance and Cultural Politics* (London, New York: Routledge, 1996), 198.

[11] Ivani Santana and Fernando Iazetta, "Liveness in mediatized dance performance – an evolutionary and semiotic approach," http://www.eca.usp.br/prof/iazzetta/papers/santana_iazzetta.pdf

violent events, are best understood as mediated records or violent moving images of the presumptive trace.[12]

On May 8, 2004 the decapitated body of Nicholas Evan Berg was found on a road outside of Baghdad. A few days later, May 11, a videotape of Berg's beheading was made available on the internet. In the video, Berg is tied by his ankles and wrists. Brief statements about injustices are made by his captures, and after a brief struggle by Berg, and a few muffled screams, his throat is cut. Nicholas' head is then sawed from his body by a large knife and is held symbolically high in the air for the camera. Although conspiracy theories surround the events, the video is generally accepted as authentic. The indexical violent moving images of Berg's murder became ostensible evidential records of the real live violent event.

Again, indexical violent moving images' ostensible constitution creates a mediated presence. Simply put, an indexical violent moving image is distinguished by mediated presence in contrast to a real live violent event's actual presence. In a slightly different sense, though, the ostensible constitution of indexical violent moving images is that they stand "unequivocally for this or that existing thing."[13] The signifier, the violent moving images, are physically connected to the signified in virtue of being forced by the conditions at the time of the event and further forces them to appear as presented: the camera cannot alter the physical things being recorded. Of course, manipulation can

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[12] From Noël Carroll, "Fiction, Non-Fiction, and the Film of Presumptive Assertion: A Conceptual Analysis" in *Film Theory and Philosophy*, ed. Richard Allen and Murray Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 173-202.

[13] Charles Sanders Pierce, *Collected papers of Charles Sanders Pierce*, ed. C. Hartshorne and P. Weiss (Cambridge: Harvard Press, 1931-1935) 4.531.

occur through pre or post editing, but generally if too many media conventions are apparent in the moment, indexical violent moving images will fail the standard of evidence. So, indexical violent moving images can be recognized as being relatively unedited, broadcast, or streamed ostensibly live. They become traces of the real live violent event, and communicate to the audience that the propositional content should be entertained as asserted. That is, the audience is not supposed to imagine into the moving image of the presumptive trace, but to accept as asserted that what the indexical violent moving image contains is evidence of what occurred. If necessary, though, we could clarify indexical to mean that indexical violent moving images point to a real live violent event as if to say, "Here is what happened." Epistemologically speaking, indexical violent moving images are evidence of what occurred, that the appearance of the images reliably corresponds to reality, and that we can gain objective knowledge or truth as spectators.

Indexical violent moving images, therefore, sneak from behind the lense that captured them with the air of being evidential records of a real live violent event. However, as Eddie Adams said about photographs in his eulogy to General Nguyen Ngoc Loan, largely famous for the photograph of him executing a Viet Cong prisoner, "People believe them, but photographs do lie, even without manipulation. They are only half-truths."[14] Likewise, moving images of the presumptive trace ostensibly merely present viewers with presumed traces of reality. They are objective and transparent, and as such

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[14] Eddie Adams, "Eulogy: General Nguyen Ngoc Loan," *Time Magazine*, July 28, 1988, http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,988783,00.html, (accessed December 2, 2009).

Nicholas Berg's beheading is simply a trace or copy of exactly what occurred not unlike seeing into the past. Of course, it would be difficult to defend the position that viewing a moving image of the presumptive trace is identical to being physically present, but it seems reasonable to say they are decent objective evidential records of what occurred. Still, it seems best to clarify the level of objectivity these records actually confer, and their epistemological force.

Following the events of September 11, 2001, newscasts, clips, home and cell phone video, were broadcast and rebroadcast. The events, while no longer live, in the colloquial sense, became records of the violence that took place that day. In seeing such images as records, as a delayed, however long, mode of being present in the sense discussed above, such mediated records obtain the status of truth and fact. However, even assuming we know moving images of the presumptive trace to not be fully live, to assign such images the status of evidential records is, as Adams calls his photographs, only a half-truth. For, moving images are similar to static images in the sense that both have boarders, both are framed, both are selected, edited, and ultimately skewed and wrapped in perspective. As such, everything that comes before and after the clip of plane 2 hitting the World Trade Center is a mediated record. It has been touched by all sorts of technology, and is filtered through the view of some producer, editor, or cameraperson.

An additional example of the often overlooked mass mediatization of moving images of the presumptive trace is the video of Nicholas Berg's murder, which was always full of multiple media influences and conventions. The video is never shown in full on American television, so if you want to see the actual murder, you have to search

the internet, and even if found, the entire events leading up to, and the images, political statements, and other parts of the video that have nothing to do with, nor the presence of, Berg, are often not available. Further, although the video is readily available to even a computer novice, the only exposure viewers have to the execution is through watching edited clips of the imagery on their local or cable channel news programs. In its popular iteration, the video's clips are bordered by crawling updates, colorful trademarks and symbols, and often subtitles or anchor's narrative voices. Thus, to say this is strictly a record of events, at least in its commonly viewed form, is inaccurate. The Berg beheading video on Aljazeera or other websites is available with less mediatization and editing, but then one must watch someone beheaded while catching a glimpse of a book sale advertisement out of the corner of one's eye. The Berg beheading video is still an indexical violent moving image in that it points to real violence, but it does so in a much less reliable way than typically assumed.

Indexical violent moving images are defined and distinguished by revealing and disputing their ostensible constitutions and type and degree of mediatization; in particular, the occurrence of mediated presence and the assumed proof or evidence of mediated records. Indexical violent moving images re-present or index real live violent events while being ontologically, phenomenologically, and epistemologically distinct from real live violent events. There is no meaningful ontological presence and as such no similar phenomenological experience between real live violent events and indexical violent moving images. Further, there is no meaningful epistemological value or evidential truth in or from indexical violent moving images that is similar to the

knowledge gained from presence at a real live violent event. However, in elucidating the ontological and epistemological shortfalls or differences between real live violent events and indexical violent moving images, we have also made clear the distinctive features that differentiate the two kinds of violent displays. Indexical violent moving images are moving images as defined above, have the propositional content of violence defined above, create a mediated presence as described above that is ontologically and phenomenologically distinct from actual presence, and create mediated records that, while powerful, are not epistemologically as strong as previously asserted.

At this point, the objection might arise that besides the content of the moving images discussed above, am I not really just drawing a distinction between any real live event and any indexical moving image. What is the relevance of the content to these distinctions? Why not just talk about real live events and indexical moving images? In response, I would say that while I think the distinctions outlined above are applicable, with a few caveats, to other kinds of real live events and moving images, the two distinguishing features of violent moving images emphasized above, mediated presence and mediated record, are uniquely pertinent and relevant to violence more so than in other kinds or types of real live events and moving images. However, let me address each distinction in turn.

Because violence is about, at least in this dissertation, action, reaction, and interaction between physical lived bodies, presence is integral to the live experience or witnessing of violence in a manner that actual presence might not be as integral to experiencing other real live events, for example, to the experience of a comedy routine.

Various sensory inputs are always important, but something extra becomes available and understood by watching lived bodies move freely within multi-dimensional space than is relevant to understanding, for example, a joke in a comedy routine. A sense of presence that negates two-dimensionality, even falsely as I have shown, is paramount to making indexical violent moving images what they are, and how they are different from real live violent events in a way that is not as important to other types of real live events and moving images.

Second, indexical violent moving images are more substantial evidential records of past events because violence is, at least here, physical. Indexical moving images of violence stand as more unequivocal records of violence, even mediated records, than say a moving image of a hug stands as a reliable record of love or friendship. That is, violent moving images are less open to interpretation than moving images of other real live events because violent moving images have a stronger ability to stand alone. In fact, they often supercede, at least legally, oral or written records of events. Very little can change the violent action per se in the same magnitude or degree that the emotional background, historical background, or other prior events can so drastically change a non-violent moving image or action, such as a hug.

Therefore, besides content, these categories are particularly relevant and descriptive of indexical violent moving images and not just indexical moving images in general. Interestingly, though, real live violent events do share propositional content with indexical violent moving images, and as such we can see an early imbrication or overlap

between members of the continuum. However, there is also another imbrication that

arises at the other end of indexical violent moving images.

Imbrications

One way to distinguish between real live violent events and indexical violent

moving images is to understand the former as phenomena of natural meaning; that is,

"natural meaning, being objective and informational, is untrammeled by imagination,

make-believe, connotation, fantasy, subjectivity, expressivity, figuration, infelicity,

insincerity, and all that might converge with fiction."[15] Above, I have demonstrated how

even fully live, unedited indexical violent moving images involve mediatization which

alters natural meaning to the extent that, while relatively reliable as evidential records and

evoking of emotional states similar to actual presence, are not phenomenologically,

epistemologically, or ontologically identical to real live violent events. Specifically,

indexical violent moving images create a mediated presence and mediated records that,

even if aimed at objectivity, are subjective or unintentionally insincere. However, I think

it is justifiable to call indexical violent moving images non-fiction in the colloquial sense

since, although mediated, they generally present or assert the images contained therein as

authentic historic traces of real live violent events.[16] The propositional content of

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[15] Trevor Ponech, "What is Non-fiction Cinema," *Film Theory and Philosophy*, ed. Richard Allen and Murray Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 204.

[16] Noël Carroll, "Fiction, Non-fiction, and the Film of Presumptive Assertion: A Conceptual Analysis," *Film Theory and Philosophy*, ed. Richard Allen and Murray Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 188.

indexical violent moving images is asserted by the film-maker,[17] and correctly

entertained by the audience, as traces of the real. Therefore, at least as commonly read,

indexical violent moving images are non-fiction. Still, it would be hasty, although easy,

to simply begin discussing realist violent moving images as fictions or fictional

representations of violence. While I do believe realist violent moving images are

fictional kinds, there is a grey area, overlap, or imbrication on the continuum between

indexical violent moving images and realist violent moving images that requires

elucidation. This large category of imbrications is often called documentaries.

Documentaries, and to a certain extent sometimes mockumentaries, intricately interweave

indexical violent moving images and realist violent moving images and thus cannot be

too hastily classified as either. As such, it makes sense to define or clarify this point on

the continuum of violent moving images where such imbrications reside, and the best

way to begin to explain documentaries as different from indexical violent moving

images, or violent moving images of the presumptive trace, is as violent moving images

of presumptive assertion.[18]

  The War Tapes is a documentary film about a New Hampshire National Guard

unit before, during, and after its deployment to Iraq. The film focuses on a handful of

Guardsmen and contains recorded live violent moving images from cameras mounted in

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[17] The term film-maker is a stand in for the creator of a moving image, but since moving images are typically referred to with less specificity as films or movies, I think it is okay to call the creator of such moving images the film-maker of author.

[18] From, Noël Carroll, "Fiction, Non-fiction, and the Film of Presumptive Assertion: A Conceptual Analysis," *Film Theory and Philosophy*, ed. Richard Allen and Murray Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Humvees, held by soldiers, and, less frequently, video shot by the director and cinematographer. In addition, the film contains interviews with soldiers' family and friends, photographs taken in Iraq, broadcast news footage, stock footage, and various other moving and static violent images. As such, the documentary is interspersed with indexical violent moving images of the Iraq war and primarily consists of recorded live indexical violent moving images while still revealing a high degree of post-editing, authorial force, construction, and polish. Therefore, in contrast to the indexical violent moving images discussed above, it seems intuitively wrong to classify the film as an indexical violent moving image akin to the fully live or even recorded live because of the level of manipulation or mediatization involved in the creation of such a film. Further, this documentary, unlike the indexical violent moving images discussed above, presents a stronger and more developed stance or story, and is far more touched by subjective hands. Instead, it seems better to see this type of film as a sub-genre of the non-fiction film. In contrast to violent moving images of the presumptive trace, then, we should call this kind of violent moving image, as Carroll does, moving images of presumptive assertion.

A violent moving image of presumptive assertion is one in which the film-maker maintains an assertoric intention. This means that the filmmaker, although possibly lying, is nevertheless committed to the truth and plausibility of what the film asserts, and that the audience does not merely imagine that what is presented is reliably true, but entertains as asserted what the sender intends; that is, the audience believes what is offered when presented with violent moving images that assert truth. In contrast, violent

moving images of the presumptive trace assert authenticity per se or in virtue of what they are. In contrast, violent moving images of presumptive assertion have more of an author's hand while still asserting plausibility and believability. Spectators do not merely imagine that Sergeant Stephen Pink from *The War Tapes* was in The National Guard, fought as depicted in Iraq, or that the interviews of family, friends, and fellow soldiers re-present who they say they are and felt or feel the way they say they do. Nor do viewers imagine that events or images depicted are not presented or misrepresented by the author with the intention of tricking the viewer, but, that the propositional content is reliably accurate and meant to be understood and accepted as such. In addition, though, audiences do not view all the interspersed clips of Iraq war footage as authentic traces because this is not what the film-maker intends. Some violent images are stock footage of violent events this particular National Guard unit never experienced, whereas violent moving images of the presumptive trace have no such authorial force and are meant to be taken as traces of what they appear to be. In short, it was the creator's intention, and the viewer's perception, that *The War Tapes* tells the story of five National Guard soldiers and does so with the assertion that what is presented are the facts of what occurred. In other words, the film-maker asserts; here are the people, the real people involved in the story. At other times the author intends, and the film-viewer recognize without subtitles or extra information, that not all of the violent moving images onscreen are intended to be authentic traces, and this reality does not alter or undermine the film-maker's intentions or asserted truths.

The moving image of presumptive assertion is not the same as an indexical violent moving image, even though it may contain indexical violent moving images, as *The War Tapes* does, but it is also not what we would call a fictional or realist violent moving images. Therefore, it represents an imbrication or overlap between two places on the continuum, further revealing the benefit of developing a continuum of violent moving images instead of trying too hard to cram certain aberrations or unique manifestations of violent moving images into broad but unrefined categories such as non-fiction and fiction.

However, what can be said of movies such as the 1978 cult classic *Faces of Death* which intricately interweaves indexical violent moving images and fictional realist violent moving images while at every moment deceiving the audience in a multitude of ways? Is this a violent moving image of presumptive assertion or a more impure form of fiction? *Faces of Death* contains an even greater and somewhat equal mix of stock footage or indexical violent moving images intermixed with completely fictional violent moving images of actors in entirely fictional situations. For example, at one point in the film the viewer is shown stock footage of the real slaughter of animals for the food industry, and moments later the fictional representation of a group of connoisseurs eating monkey brains, and followed by a fictional account of an animal control agent who dies while trying to capture an alligator that is on the loose. The animal slaughters are indexical violent moving images recorded live in a slaughterhouse, the monkey and alligator scenes are staged acts in which none of the participants, animal or human, are what they appear or represent to be (the monkey is sometimes rubber), or are harmed in

the way the film maker asserts (the animal control agent does not die). As such, these violent moving images are meant to trick the viewer, and the author is intentionally dissimulating. Is this film a documentary as it claims to be? No, and maybe simply in virtue of this does it become fiction, but it unequivocally contains indexical violent moving images that are not lies and correctly asserted as truth. The film-maker is not dissimulating so how can *Faces of Death* be categorized as violent moving images of presumptive assertion when the audience cannot reliably count on the filmmaker, but still knows some of the imagery is authentic? Further, the film is not simply a mockumentary akin to *The Blair Witch Project* since it is meant to be read or asserted as truth and even though the allure of *The Blair Witch Project* comes from momentarily believing or entertaining the possibility of the truth contained therein, there is really no way around the disbelief, and audiences only make-believe the asserted reality because this is what the authors intend. So, the only reasonable answer is that *Faces of Death* is incredibly difficult to define, and further reinforces the need for a fully developed continuum of violent moving images in which to place such violent moving images without having to choose between two overly strict categories.

Maybe, though, while *The War Tapes* aims at a level of impartiality, even in its methodology, *Faces of Death* does not, at least sincerely. Presumably, documentaries often claim a level of impartiality, and maybe even strive for objectivity, sincerely. Many fall short of this standard while still being commonly labeled as documentary because the film-makers intent becomes the criterion. Michael Moore would not even claim that his political views do not shape his work such as *Fahrenheit 9/11* or *Bowling*

for Columbine. The perspectives revealed in documentaries like Moore's, as opposed to the perspectives of producers or directors of news programs, are so much more prominent, identifiable, and often intentional, that they stretch the limits of what might be called indexical. Nevertheless, *Faces of Death* is not akin to *Bowling for Columbine* even with Moore's penchant for the overly dramatic. It seems necessary to default to the standards laid forth by moving images of the presumptive assertion, which Moore's films pass while still not being called purely non-fiction or purely fiction. We are still left, then, with violent moving images such as *Faces of Death*, and all that seems possible to say is that it is an imbrication and allow the ambiguity to stand. This, it seems, is what must be done, however unsatisfying, but it is important to have this place on the continuum to locate such violent moving images even if they defy definition.

What of the complaint that films like *Bowling for Columbine* or *Faces of Death* contain more than just violent moving images? Why not simply say parts of the film contain indexical violent moving images, and parts of the film contain realist violent moving images? This seems to make sense, but then how is such a film classified? Why let the ambiguities stand when they can be clarified? Second, it seems if we go down that path with the film *The War Tapes*, we would have to distinguish it into part indexical violent moving images, part realist violent moving images, part indexical moving images, part realist moving images, part static violent photographs, part static photographs. What might follow from such a deconstructive methodology is to then claim that the entire film is really a collection of static images strung together, and static images are really windows to the world more so than mere traces, and then such windows are not really

that different from real live events, and by the time we are finished deconstructing the film we have undone all the work accomplished so far. Or, why not say that since the entire film is really a collection of static images strung together, and static images are really only half-truths, or framed, or subjective in some sense that there is only fiction and no moving images that are really non-fiction. So what? Besides frustrating the movie store clerk, all of the violent moving images in *Faces of Death* are juxtaposed against each other to affect how each is read. So, to talk of one without the other is to miss how the film in total works, and this is where authorial intent begins to matter more so than with pure indexical violent moving images. This type of deconstructive process makes it difficult to address different violent moving images in turn because we might also end up saying all violent moving images are in some way touched, and so it is all fiction. However, the development of refinements through classifying the various incarnations of violent moving images is a process I feel is necessary for fully understanding all of the nuances and intricacies of violent moving images, and thus by extension also violence itself. We do not claim all violence is the same, and we should not. Self-defense is different from premeditated murder, and a slap is different from a stab. If we wish to not profoundly explore the topic, by all means deconstruct these violent moving images, but that is not the project at hand, and overlooks the real need for a detailed analysis of a phenomenon that is so misunderstood yet so prominent and important.

Moving beyond inclinations to absorb categories and genres into one another, the sub-genre of non-fiction violent moving images such as *The War Tapes* allows a more

cautious and diligent move toward what are traditionally referred to as fictional violent moving images. In particular, realist violent moving images. What follows below, then, is an account of what types of things are likely to be presented when viewing realist violent moving images. Or, to answer the question, what kinds of realist violent moving images are there, and why are they worth the greater analysis that follows? A quick justification for analyzing realist violent moving images is that indexical violent moving images are not consumed in mass for entertainment purposes, or, at least not consumed in mass for the purpose of feeling pleasure, enjoyment, and the like. However, realist violent moving images are mimetic representations of the same things indexical violent moving images re-present. Why? Why are these violent moving images, similar in so many ways, affective in such different ways? What is the allure of realist violent moving images? First, though, how are realist violent moving images unique, and what are realist violent moving images?

<div align="center">Realist Violent Moving Images</div>

Shortly into Steven Spielberg's 1998 film *Saving Private Ryan*, the images of a veteran and his family slowly transitions into what becomes a lengthy representation of the Omaha Beach landing in Normandy on June 6, 1944 of World War II. Movie reviews called the opening sequences real, raw, detailed, grisly, or otherwise unlike typical war movies in many ways, the most prominent is its realistic depiction of war battles. Veterans of the Omaha Beach invasion mentioned being moved by the depiction because of its realism. Documentaries like *The War Tapes* contain similar stories, imagery, and violent moving images of graphic violence but for some reason, fictional re-presentations

are exponentially more profitable. Why do people, besides overwhelming marketing influence, crowd theaters to consume *Black Hawk Down* and not *The War Tapes*? It seems the former is alluring in ways that the other is not. However, before answering these questions, we must again clarify what is under discussion. So, what conditions define realist violent moving images, how are they different from the non-fiction violent moving images discussed above, and ultimately, what are the intangible qualities present in fictional violent moving images that requires deeper analysis and understanding.

In contrast to the non-fiction violent moving images discussed above, fictional violent moving images are much more variegated. Indexical violent moving images, regardless of degrees of mediatization, are nevertheless imbued with traces of the real, with the truth, and an audience can pick up on these traces and read non-fiction as grounded in authenticity. There is a different relationship between film-maker and film-viewer[19] in fictional violent moving images than there is in non-fictional violent moving images, and this is a helpful way to begin to elucidate some essential or defining characteristics of realist violent moving images.

Referring to fiction in literature, Gregory Currie develops an account of fiction that can be helpfully mapped onto, or applied to, moving images to begin to demonstrate the difference between non-fiction violent moving images: violent moving images that precede realist violent moving images on the continuum, and fictional violent moving

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[19] Again, I use film-maker and film-viewer here as a stand in for the maker and the viewer of violent moving images for brevity and ease of reading. Please understand film-maker as referring to the creator(s) of the violent moving image under discussion, and film-viewer as the audience of the violent moving images under discussion.

images, realist violent moving images and beyond on the continuum. On Currie's account there is a complex interrelationship between the maker and the receiver of illocutionary acts, assertions, and the like. Ultimately, on Currie's account, the maker of fiction lacks serious deception.[20] In other words, there is no intent on the part of the author to trick the audience into believing as true what is really fiction. Therefore, in addition, the viewer must also take an attitudinal position, as a result of various cues or clues, of make-believe. The author and audience take fictive stances in the creation and reception of the work, respectively. This is similar to what occurs with fictional violent moving images: realist violent moving images and beyond.

Realist violent moving images are mimetic representations of real, probable, or possible events of violent propositional content. An initial way to distinguish realist violent moving images from indexical violent moving images is to label the former fiction and the latter non-fiction. Often, the distinction between fiction and non-fiction is largely due to the attitudinal or intentional stances taken by the receiver and maker of the violent moving images. Film-makers of moving images of presumptive assertion intend to assert as true, and to have audiences fix an attitude of trusting as asserted as true, the moving images contained in their film. Of course, it was shown above how this interrelationship of mutual trust or faith between film-maker and film-viewer becomes broken with violent moving images like those in *Faces of Death* in which the film-makers never meant for their audience to engage in an agreed upon form of make-believe as film-viewers do in most fictions. The film-makers desired, intended, and constructed

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[20] Gregory Currie, "What is Fiction?" *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* Vol 43 (4) (1985): 385-392.

their violent moving images such that viewers were to believe they were watching non-fiction. Nevertheless, the film was only a partial truth, that is, the indexical violent moving images were reliable authentic traces of real live violent events, and the violent moving images of assumed presumptive assertion were in fact fiction, mimetic representations, or realist violent moving images. However, it might be contended that the film-makers intention and the film-viewers expectations actually coincided.

A number of iterations of the video box cover of *Faces of Death* contain warnings that urge viewers to seriously contemplate what they are about to buy, rent, and ultimately watch. Therefore, the film-makers do not intend or even desire that the viewers entertain or make-believe the violent moving images contained therein as real, but to accept as asserted the truth or authenticity of all the violent moving images even if not all of them are what they claim to be. The film-viewer gets exactly what she or he wanted, even if they are wrong or mislead by violent moving images that are only half-truths or completely false. Thus, there is less negligible or dishonest dissimulation between the film-maker and the film-viewer. Therefore, *Faces of Death* as a pseudo-documentary, half-documentary, or even maybe mockumentary presents a weaker non-fictive stance than indexical violent moving images whose stronger non-fictive stance is often unquestioned. In contrast to both, then, realist violent moving images may be defined as taking, without equivocation or dissimulation, a wholly fictive stance. Another way to understand fictional realist violent moving images are films in which the film-maker and film-viewer have reached a real, true, and mutual agreement about the way in which the violent moving images contained therein are presented and engaged.

However, realist violent moving images distinguish themselves not only from the non-fiction violent moving images presented above, but also from other kinds of fictional violent moving images as well. Namely, they aim at a realism mimetic of real live violent events or indexical violent moving images without the exaggeration and lack of realism of iconic violent moving images. This realism, though, takes many forms and what follows below, then, is an account of the types of realism within realist violent moving images. Realist violent moving images are mimetic representations, but what essential features or qualities classify or create conditions for something to be identified as a realist violent moving images. To begin, let us examine some common features or forms of fictional violent moving images that aim to represent real live violence as realistically as possible.

Realist violent moving images break from the indexical in that they no longer re-present real live violent events, but fictionally represent real live violence. Realist violent moving images strive to imitate as closely as possible violence in the following four ways: one, representing violent events that have occurred; two, representing people engaged in violent behavior or subjected to violence that are or have been extant; three, representing entirely fictional people engaged in violence or subject to violence with authentic motivations and reactions; four, representing entirely fictional violent events with authentic or realistic bodies. Let us begin with the first common form of realistic depiction of real live violent events, the reenactment.

A type of realistic violent moving image is the reenactment. Reenactments are similar to the performative documentary as described by Bill Nichols;[21] however, realist violent moving images that are primarily or exclusively reenactments differ from their documentary counterparts in virtue of the fictive stance that the author and the audience agree to entertain. In addition, documentaries employ a multitude of non-fictional media conventions reenactments do not; for example, recorded live interviews, indexical violent moving images, non-fiction stock footage, and so forth. The 2001 movie *Black Hawk Down* is an example of realist violent moving imagery in the form of a reenactment.

Black Hawk Down reenacts the Battle of Mogadishu that took place in early October of 1993. The violent moving images aim to realistically reenact moment by moment many of the events that took place following an Army Ranger raid into Mogadishu, Somalia and the subsequent shooting down of two Black Hawk helicopters. The majority of events are drawn from the book of the same name, which were mostly drawn from articles in "The Philadelphia Inquirer." Film-maker Ridley Scott attempted to recreate and represent through reenactment as realistically as possible the real live violent events of those two days in Somalia. Scott says, "Nothing in there is invented. It's the events as recorded by Mark [Bowden] in his interviews with these guys."[22] Reenactments, like *Black Hawk Down*, endeavor toward a high degree of realism, and this realism creates a phenomenological experience of less authenticity than that of

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[21] Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).

[22] Ridley Scott, interview held at Clift Hotel, San Francisco, California, January 8, 2002.

indexical violent moving images, but of far more complexity, significance, and depth than those from iconic violent moving images.

Although it is possible that the film-viewer has no idea that she or he are watching a reenactment and therefore less affected, for example *We Were Soldiers* seems a little too pastoral at times, heightened degrees of realism are represented and nonetheless perceived during realistic reenactments of real live violence. Reenactments are imbued with light traces of reality, and this is because reenactments have requisite authentic power or force albeit in lesser proportion to that imbued in indexical violent moving images. Realistic violent moving images focus on representing actual events, and the principal feature that makes them so experientially unique is that the events represented are accurate and authentic recreations or reenactments. Still, the presence of a reenactment of real live violent events is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition to classify violent moving imagery as realist. Characters represented engaging in and subject to violence are equally as important as the violent events themselves.

Although *Black Hawk Down* does not succeed without the audience caring about the characters, the film itself is not in any real way character driven but rather event driven. This is not to say, though, that character driven fictional violent moving images are not also alluring. Realistic violent moving images with confirmed characters represent real extant or previously extant people committing or being subject to violence. In addition, though, there must be a concerted effort by the writers, film-makers, and actors to imitate or depict such confirmed characters as they are or were. Ultimately, this form of fictional violent moving images emphasizes realistic character portrayal.

Confirmed character representations focus on authentic realistic characters, and principally this involves actors portraying real people, and having some reliable access to understanding and subsequently authentically depicting these real people. For example, the HBO miniseries *Generation Kill* follows a Marine Corps reconnaissance platoon in Iraq made of key characters: reporter Evan Wright (Lee Tergesen), Sergeant Brad Colbert (Alexander Skarsgard), Corporal Josh Ray Person (James Ransone), and Lance Corporal Harold James Trombly (Billy Lush). While the events represented are relatively accurate, the aim of the violent moving images is a study or accurate character imitation and an attempt to represent the people involved in the real live violence of the Iraq war as realistically as possible. Therefore, characters in films such as *Inglourious Basterds* may resemble actual people, Nazi soldiers, Jewish-American soldiers, Adolf Hitler, but audiences know they do not authentically represent even the historically real people, a clue is that Adolf Hitler is successfully assassinated. As such, *Inglourious Basterds* succeeds as a revenge film, but not as containing violent moving images that represent confirmed characters.

Fictional violent moving images of the form of reenactments or containing confirmed characters accomplish their unique phenomenological power because, on the whole, film-maker and film-viewer enter into a mutual relationship, whether through prior knowledge of the film, onscreen cues or clues, or intuition, that the events or characters onscreen are accurate mimetic representations of real live violent events or people involved in real live violence. The violent moving images aim to represent as realistically as possible true or real violence. Yet, neither reenactments nor confirmed

characters are individually necessary conditions or together a sufficient condition to classify violent moving images as realist. However, a further exegesis reveals specific features generally found within these forms of fictional violent moving images that are truly essential qualities or necessary features of realist violent moving images.

In *Generation Kill*, viewers merely need to know, or rely on the film-makers to let them know, that these are confirmed characters to accept as accurately represented their violent behavior or reactions to violence. Certain behavior in *Generation Kill* seems bizarre, for example, when Corporal Person exits his Humvee in the middle of an intense firefight to urge other drivers behind him to back-up. The response to violence seems unrealistic, but an interview with the real Corporal Person reveals that this is in fact how he behaved. Nevertheless, audiences do not have to see the interview to believe the behavior as mimetic of the real reactions of Corporal Person in virtue of previous audience acceptance of his being a confirmed character. It is not, however, the presence of confirmed characters that generates realist violent moving images since it is possible to have fictional characters and still have a work of realist violent moving images. What is important, though, is that the fictional or non-fictional characters accurately represent natural impetuses to violence or reactions to violence.

In the 1971 film *Straw Dogs*, Dustin Hoffman as David Sumner takes his new wife to live in a small farmhouse in a small village in Great Britain where his wife was raised. In part, Sumner is fleeing the hectic Vietnam protests and social upheavals of the time in favor a more peaceful and idyllic lifestyle. What would turn this otherwise peaceful, violence repulsed man into a person capable of extreme acts of violence? Well,

probably the series of events that unfold throughout the film in which Sumner and his wife are subjected to various forms of psychological torment, physical and sexual violence, utter confusion, and intense fear. The audience believes Sumner's motivations for violence because they seem authentic in a way the motivations for Howard Payne's (Dennis Hopper) violent behavior in *Speed*, anger over his retirement, are unbelievable impetuses for the intricate and violent plan Payne puts into motion by planting a bomb on a bus.

So, how does the audience recognize natural impetuses? Knowledge of authentic behavior results from identification with the characters represented in the sense that film-viewers imagine themselves in the shoes of these other people. Through sympathy or empathy, imagination or make-believe, viewers use cues and intuition to determine if character behavior is concurrent with reasonable behavior of people like themselves involved in similar situations. More simply, this engagement is most likely some kind of emotional simulation in which viewers simulate the emotional states of characters from the inside, that is, imagine they are those people in those circumstances.[23] This capacity or ability to imagine or make-believe in this fashion is controversial, and will be discussed in more detail in Chapters 3 and 4, but something like an empathetic engagement reveals the authenticity or realistic representation of motivations for and to violence of non-fiction and fictional characters.

Straw Dogs realistically represents natural impetuses to violence and appropriate degrees of violent responses to harms and threats of harms in a manner *Speed* does not.

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[23] Murray Smith, "Imagining from the Inside," *Film Theory and Philosophy*, ed. Richard Allen and Murray Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1997), 415.

In fact, *Speed* also misrepresents reactions to violence as Jack Traven (Keanu Reeves) and Annie Porter (Sandra Bullock) seem relatively relaxed considering the violence and harms they undergo throughout the movie. Therefore, the violent moving images of *Straw Dogs* would be classified as a realist and those of *Speed* would not because of the ways in which impetuses to, and reactions to, violence are represented. However, natural impetuses to violence are only a necessary not sufficient condition for a realist violent moving image since while the motivations may be realistic, the violence itself may not be authentic.

Above, it has been demonstrated that a character's reality, or lack thereof, is not a necessary feature of realist violent moving images. Besides characters' natural impetuses, violent moving images also need not have occurred to be realist just realistically authentic. Since violence, at least for these purposes is bodily or corporeal, fictional violent moving images need to realistically represent bodies as correlates of real lived bodies, that is, the imagery must accurately and realistically represent violence and harm itself. Substantial bodies, as they were, inflict and endure violence in a realistic manner. For example, the opening scene of Gasper Noé's *Irreversible* involves a concerted effort to realistically depict the violence that happens in the first minutes of the film as Marcus (Vincent Cassel) and Pierre (Albert Dupontel) exact a brutal revenge on Marcus's girlfriend's presumed rapist.

At the outset of the film a great effort is made toward realism in the sense that the scenes are supposed to look as real, raw, and authentic as possible. The film-makers

endeavored for realism at every moment in every frame.[24] While the film evoked strong responses from audiences because of its realism, it is all a function of a master creation. None of the events really happened, but in particular none of the people onscreen were really harmed. The violent bludgeoning, rape, and beatings read as authentic because arms, faces, and even genitalia are digitally constructed in order to be carefully manipulated frame by frame to imitate a real body's reaction to violence. Whole frames are invisibly spliced or overlapped together to create seamless takes, and this level of detail and authenticity typifies this point on the continuum, that is, the appearance and effort at a mimetic representation of violence and its effects on real or substantial bodies.

Ultimately, viewers discover the real reason behind Marcus' and Pierre's anger and subsequent violence, and thus are presented with fictional violent moving images that are neither reenactments nor contain confirmed characters but rather the more essential features of natural impetuses and substantial bodies. Therefore, *Irreversible* is defined or classified as a realist violent moving image and has revealed the necessary and sufficient conditions required to classify fictional violent moving images as realist.

A number of concerns might arise surrounding the effort devoted to analyzing fictional violent moving images, and since the chapters that follow focus on realist violent moving images, and by extension fictional violent moving images in general, it is pertinent to

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[24] That realist violent moving images are often constructed so thoroughly might account for their moral force; that is, *Irreversible* has more moral force and therefore contains what I call realist strong violent moving images because Gasper Noé constructed it to accomplish as much. In contrast, *Reservoir Dogs* was not constructed by Quentin Tarantino in such a way as to have as much moral force; therefore, *Reservoir Dogs* contains what will be defined and discussed below as realist weak violent moving images. While I think authorial intent or purpose is not the sole determinant of moral force or message, its relevance to realist strong violent moving images cannot be overlooked.

answer the question; why care about fictional violent moving images that are ostensibly created for entertainment?

Realist violent moving images are consumed in mass, regarded as otherwise pure entertainment or fantasy, and watched ostensibly for pleasure. The indexical violent moving images realist violent moving images attempt to imitate through mimetic representation are generally not regarded or experienced similarly. In other words, something found morally abhorrent, disgusting, or otherwise unpleasant or distasteful is enjoyed rather than avoided when it takes the form of fiction. Why? What is so unique about realist violent moving images that allows them to be so alluring and at the same time avoid the moral judgments assigned to virtually identical re-presentations? Today, the distinction between the appearance of non-fiction and fictional violence is practically invisible. What is the unique or essential quality that realist violent moving images afford viewers that explain the phenomenon of their mass appeal? By what is the audiences' experience altered so drastically? If there is no such feature or condition, then the explanation seems to be that audiences simply enjoy the pain and suffering of others and the moniker of fiction assigned to realist violent moving images is an easy excuse for viewers to be morally guiltless for indulging macabre desires. The analysis of fictional realist violent moving images that follows in the chapters below provides an answer that redeems the audiences of realist violent moving images and helps further explain the possible appeal of real violence.

It will become evident that realist violent moving images provide a unique phenomenological experience in a manner that iconic, less graphic, violent moving

images do not afford. Viewers respond and experience realist violent moving images differently than they do indexical violent moving images and iconic violent moving images and so it is worthwhile to explore how and why this occurs. This dissertation chooses to focus on realist violent moving images because of their unique ontological, phenomenological, and epistemological qualities, but other forms of violent moving images are equally worthy of analysis in an effort to understand cultural and social perceptions of violence and violent behavior itself. Because, if audiences are in fact affected in unique ways by realist violent moving images, that is, enjoy and derive pleasure from watching the realistically depicted harm and suffering of others, should there not be more visible and vocal concerns raised about the emotions elicited?

Finally, the account above neglects or underemphasizes the importance of narrative, plot, pacing, and other media conventions that in other genres seems to generate their unique audience responses and allure. However, it is important to realize that realist violent moving images are different from other realist moving images because they do not derive their phenomenological power in the same manner other genres such as romance derive their unique experiential power. Realist violent moving images do not need to the same degree stories, plotting, or pacing to push them forward or appeal to viewers. Realistic characters, events, and motivations necessitate plot and stories, but fictional violent moving images are unique in that individual scenes or realist moving images of violence within a longer series of realist moving images that are non-violent can be decontextualized and retain their allure.

For example, the ending scene of the romantic comedy *Sleepless in Seattle* cannot stand alone and elicit anything but a superficial viewer response. Absent the background that precedes the final rendezvous, the realist moving images fail. The beginning/end of *Irreversible*, however, does not require background knowledge to profoundly affect the viewer, indeed, no such information is provided. Background may help provide an even deeper or more varied emotional response, but narrative, plot, and so forth do not account for why people will simply watch clips or brief scenes of realist violent moving images while having never seen the film the clips are severed from. While I do not disagree that narrative or other factors function as an important feature, especially say in horror where we have a fascination with the monsters presented onscreen, mysteries in which a question and answer structure is constructed,[25] or some form of desire and frustration loop pushing the story forward and pulling the audience in,[26] violent moving images are alluring absent all of the typical context required for a strong emotional response. The allure of violent moving images cannot be explained only by pointing to narrative or plot as in other genres. There is an incomplete account of the allure of realist violent moving images, and this misunderstanding reveals a deeper misunderstanding of the appeal of real violence.

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[25] Noël Carroll, *The philosophy of horror, or, Paradoxes of the heart*, (London: Routledge, 1990).

[26] Aaron Smuts, "The Desire-Frustration Theory of Suspense," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 66:3 (Summer 2008): 281-192.

Imbrications

The realist violent moving images of films such as *Irreversible* afford audiences unique deep phenomenological experiences and opportunities for profound self-reflective contemplation by realistically imitating real live violence through representing natural impetuses and substantial bodies. However, different instances of realist violent moving images, while all containing natural impetuses and substantial bodies, nevertheless do not all evoke similarly powerful responses and deep phenomenological experiences. It is necessary, then, to distinguish between realist violent moving images that contain strong violence, and realist violent moving images that contain weak violence. Recall, according to Devin McKinney, "strong violence enables-and often entails-shifts in one's moral position. This is part of its power, and a great deal of its threat."[27] Realist violent moving images of strong violence, even with fictional characters or events, afford spectators profound self-reflective contemplation. Therefore, when engaged with realist strong violent moving images, film-viewers are confronted with a confusing psychological situation. Audiences often have deep and strong reactions, moral or otherwise, to realist strong violent moving images while simultaneously being allured or attracted to the unpleasant acts realist strong violent moving images represent. Realist strong violent moving images confront viewers with imagery that is visually identical to often repulsive real live violence while simultaneously enticing viewers to safely entertain excitation that is intuitively denied while watching indexical violent moving images. It seems, natural impetuses and substantial bodies coupled with the essential

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[27] Devin McKinney, "Violence: The Strong and the Weak," *Screening Violence*, ed. Stephen Prince (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 106.

features and conditions outlined in Chapter 1 are individually necessary and together sufficient to generate realist strong violent moving images, but some other feature or features must be present that creates strong rather than weak violent moving images. This unarticulated feature is an intangible yet powerful quality that will be searched for throughout the remainder of this dissertation that helps to explain the allure of realist strong violent moving images. First, though, it is necessary to finish constructing the continuum of violent moving images to correctly situate realist strong violent moving images.

At the end of the film *Green Street Hooligans*, about soccer team firms or gangs that fight each other in support of their local team, Tommy Hatcher (Geoff Bell) straddles Pete Dunham (Charlie Hunnam) and repeatedly punches Pete's face in retaliation for Pete's accusation that Tommy was responsible for Tommy's son's death. There is nothing particularly special about the realist violent moving images except that they work to draw attention to a representation of real violence. The scene foregoes special sound effects or over exaggerated flailing and jerking head movements. Pete just gets repeatedly punched, and nothing overly dramatic happens to his head or face because during real live violence scars and bruises do not appear instantaneously. As a result of this mimetic representation of real live violence, viewers are forced to confront deep-seated beliefs, maybe moral, about violence. Until this point in the film, violence was represented differently, even if realistically, but it is only realist strong violent moving images that elicit deep self-reflective thought about morality and violence. So, what of the rest of the realist violent images of the film, or whole films such as *Reservoir Dogs*

where the violence seems both visually and motivationally authentic? Such realist weak violent moving images are imbrications between fictional realist strong violent moving images and fictional iconic violent moving images that forego realism in favor of other alluring qualities.

Realist weak violent moving images are defined by their lack of strong violence. Although powerful, realist weak violent moving images lack the impact of realist strong violent moving images. For example, the most notorious scene from *Reservoir Dogs* involves Michael Madsen as robber Mr. Blonde torturing a kidnapped police officer. The notorious scene is too self-aware to accomplish any deep moral reflection or emotion. It is, not begrudgingly, too cool. The music, the dancing, and all the other fine polished touches fail to confront the viewer with anything meaningful to contemplate. The scene works, and audiences enjoy it, but no deep or profound reflection about violence or morality arises. This is not to say that the violence itself is not authentic. It takes time for Mr. Blonde to severe the ear off of the cop, and while Mr. Blonde seems demented, his character, given the audiences understanding of him, seems naturally albeit psychopathically motivated to inflict the violence he does. However, the violence is just weak, not in the sense of not being graphic, but in the sense that the whole scene reeks of style, and the audience cannot avoid being distracted but entertained with the film-maker's representation. As such, *Reservoir Dogs*, and realist weak violent moving images like it, fail to achieve a profound viewer experience. Even while representing natural impetuses and authentic violence, realist weak violent moving images lack an essential feature that necessitates examination. Realist weak violent moving images are

alluring because film-makers such as Quentin Tarantino skillfully and adeptly employ cinematic techniques, narration, and characters that explain why the unpleasant violent torture by Mr. Blonde becomes pleasant to watch. That is, it is not the violence per se that is alluring, but the elements of style behind them. This is not the case with realist strong violent moving images. In those instances, it is the violence itself that attracts, and for reasons not yet elucidated.

<div align="center">Iconic Violent Moving Images</div>

By removing the conditions of natural impetuses and substantial bodies from realist violent moving images, a class of violent moving images reveal themselves called iconic violent moving images. Iconic violent moving images represent the bulk of violent moving images consumed in popular culture. Such popular fictional violent moving images do not aim at realism, but rather underdeveloped characters, over exaggerated violence, and otherwise large-scale representations of bodies flailing and flying around the screen. These violent moving images are the blockbusters and rainmakers of the film industry, and it is not difficult to ascertain their appeal. Iconic violent moving images are roller-coaster rides that strive for fantasy fulfillment, thrill, and physiological excitation. What defines this final form of violent moving images? Well, hardly violence at all. Iconic violent moving images are far removed from the realism of realist violent moving images, and almost unrecognizable from real live violent events. A gloss or haze covers the entire experience in order to numb the experience of violence in iconic violent moving images by dulling the potential relationship or recognition of tangible bodily harm.

Iconic violent moving images contain characters and bodies but to a much lesser degree of realism than realist violent moving images. Iconic violent moving images contain, instead, choreographed superhuman bodies. That is, represented bodies that resemble or imitate real bodies, which are either much stronger or much weaker than authentic substantial bodies. Iconic violent moving images begin, as much as they do, by straying from a realistic representation of a vulnerable body. Often, iconic violent moving images gain their iconic status as the result of a carefully choreographed dance between overly strong bodies in battle or action. For example, in the first and subsequent *Rocky* movies, Sylvester Stallone as Philadelphia native Rocky Balboa is an amateur down and out boxer forced to provide muscle for local bookies. However, through some luck and a clever ring name (The Italian Stallion) he is chosen to fight the champ Apollo Creed (Carl Weathers). Although Rocky enlists the help of sage coach Mickey (Burgess Meredith), Rocky never achieves the status of a technically good fighter until iteration 3. In the original *Rocky*, Balboa puts up a respectable fight, and it is Rocky's capacity to take, absorb, and inflict physical damage or harm that gains him fame and adulation. In *Rocky 5*, it is said, "the man fought wars in the ring,"[28] and in *Rocky 4* Ivan Drago (Dolph Lundgren) claims, "he's not human, he's like a piece of iron."[29] These statements are all true, Balboa's body is depicted as far stronger than a realistic substantial body. Round after round Rocky and his opponents punch back and forth, give and take, until Rocky finally prevails, and although Rocky is battered and bruised, the physical harms are far

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[28] Director John G. Avildson, *Rock V*, Writer Sylvester Stallone, United Artist, 1990.

[29] Director Sylvester Stallone, *Rock IV*, Writer Sylvester Stallone, United Artist, 1985.

from what would have resulted from the quantity and quality of violence he sustains in and outside the ring. This representation, though, is what typifies iconic violent moving images, the choreographed dance between superhuman bodies. Indeed, the person in charge of action film fight scenes is the fight or stunt choreographer. The idea of the choreographed body is no more evident than in the genre of martial arts films.

Iconic violent moving images represent superhuman bodies intertwined in a violent dance, and audiences enjoy the violence contained therein for many of the same reasons audiences enjoy a non-violent dance. In *Kill Bill: Vol. 1*, Black Mamba (Uma Thurman) confronts her attempted murderer O-Ren Ishii (Lucy Liu) and they enter into a modern day samurai swordfight that resembles dance in so many ways. Entering into the fight, the samurai begin a dance, albeit a mortally dangerous one, in which they are connected within the same lived frame of reference.[30] The fast paced and poignant battle is a common project unifying the two fighters in dance and at the same time keeping them keenly aware of each other's individual ambitions. In sword-fighting, and martial arts in general, combatants seem to intuit which direction the next blow or strike will come from. The ubiquitous use of slow-motion action sequences in modern iconic violent moving images has made this abundantly clear. The longer the battle, the more each swordsperson begins to know the body of the other as they engage in combat bound together by the rhythm and immediacy of the moment. Black Mamba and O-Ren Ishii give the impression of moving in unison, as one lunges forward the other instinctively lunges back. They appear counter-posed and yet flowing together. Each warrior

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[30] I owe these ideas concerning dance to Sondra Horton Fraleigh, *Dance and the Lived Body, A Descriptive Aesthetics* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1987), 193-204.

occupies her own temporal space, and it is the arduous task of the other to force the

sword into that property. Until such an event occurs, they are linked in the dance

together, and indeed it is the most important dance determining life and death. Towards

the end, though, movements become discordant and O-Ren Ishii is beheaded, and the

dance ends. Both bodies are superhuman; stronger, more flexible, and have a hyper-

awareness real substantial authentic bodies do not. The dance and the choreographed

bodies distance the viewer from the violence. The violence is iconic, but far from

realistic, and so when the final blow is dealt, there is no real connection to the body of the

injured as a correlate of the viewer's own body.

In a somewhat odd sense, then, it might be claimed that iconic violent moving

images lack the flinch factor, and this is because the bodies in iconic violent moving

images take center stage as superhuman. There is a certain uncontrollable physiological

response that manifests when watching real live violence and harms to real physical

bodies. This occurs because audiences understand and read correctly others' bodies as

correlates of their own bodies, and spectators cannot help but uncontrollably flinch at the

harms of others. For example, the cable channel MTV has a television series named

Scarred in which extreme sports athletes are showing failing at a number of activities.

Countless broken bones, compound fractures, and pools of blood fill the screen. Each

scene has the flinch factor because viewers recognize, and feel in their own bodies, the

reality of the other body and its injury. The same phenomenological experience occurs in

realist violent moving images of strong violence that realistically depict corporeal

violence. Iconic violent moving images lack this experiential power.

When Jason Vorhees, or more accurately Mrs. Vorhees (Betsy Palmer), kills Jack (Kevin Bacon) by stabbing him from underneath his bed with an archery arrow in the seminal *Friday the 13th* movie, audiences recognize Jack's body as represented as weaker than a real body. A similar recognition occurs when heads suddenly pop off in films such as *Prom Night* or *Halloween H2O*. Audiences jump, but that is not the same as a visceral flinch or shutter that occurs with realist violent moving images. Even without viewing the beheading video of Nicholas Berg discussed above, spectators intuitively recognize the strength and weakness of physical bodies, since indeed they all inhabit one. Therefore, in *Four Rooms* when Ted (Tim Roth) cuts off Norman's (Paul Calderon) finger in an homage to an episode of "Alfred Hitchcock Presents," audiences flinch because the body, or more specifically the finger of the body, is substantially real. Not in the sense of overly strong, but as being realistically weak, taking up appropriate amounts of space, having appropriate weight, and behaving as a body would. A large hatchet would quickly sever a finger, but an arrow could not with such ease be plunged into through someone's back, spine, and throat as it is in *Friday the 13th*. Iconic violent moving images purposefully shun the substantial body representation and natural impetuses of realist violent moving images in favor of a more superhuman representation of bodily violence. Iconic violent moving images are highly entertaining and as demonstrated above consumed for reasons other than their violence per se, and as a result of their mass appeal and dominant cultural presence have become the cultural icons of violence.

Iconic violent moving images classify a broad range of violent moving images, since these are the films that make the most money and thus are made and remade. They are alluring for a host of reasons, they resemble the beauties of dance, they take the viewer on a thrilling yet safe ride, and they do not require deep emotional engagement. There is nothing wrong with these films, but they pose less of a problem for understanding their appeal than realist violent moving images. Iconic violent moving images begin to look less like violence and more like aggressive or expressive movement. By convention they have become icons of violence and so audiences understand them as iconic representations of violence. However, there is one more class of violent moving images that represent no bodies, sometimes no characters, and otherwise no recognizable visual representations of violence, but have similarly over time come to symbolize violence.

<center>Symbolic Violent Moving Images</center>

The iconic taken to abstraction leads to the symbolic. Very little can be said about symbolic violent moving images sine they are in a sense placeholders for all remaining violent moving images that are neither real live violent events, indexical violent moving images, or iconic violent moving images. Symbolic violent moving images are linguistic or visual signs that through social convention come to be understood as representing violence. One way in which such symbols arise is by repeated close association with iconic violent moving images. For example, the late 1960's live action *Batman* television series starring Adam West often shows Batman and Robin fighting criminals while their punches and kicks are symbolically represented with

the signs BAM!, POW!, or the like. Over time, the iconic violent moving images are no longer necessary to represent the violence, the signs alone – BAM!/POW! – splashed across a monochrome background are enough to imply what was previously only understood with something resembling bodies in motion. The signs from *Batman* become symbolic violent moving images.

According to Charles Sanders Pierce, a symbol is a sign which refers to what it denotes according to certain social rules, conventions, or simple habitual connection. Spectators create the symbols, which are ultimately highly arbitrary since without interpreters, the viewers, they no longer symbolize what is typically referenced.[31] The creators, makers, and viewers of the *Batman* television series made BAM! and POW! into symbolic violent moving images, that is, symbols that signify violence without any other cues, clues, or visual representations of violence. Nevertheless, it is not just visual signs or signifiers such as collections of letters, colors, or visual designs that become symbolic of violence, but contemporary film and video techniques as well.

Today, point of view perspective, the rapid movement of a camera forward or backwards, or a quick shift or edit is understood by spectators as symbolic of aggression and violence. Symbolic violent moving images encapsulate any and all such moving images that fail the conditions, definitions, or descriptions outlined above but nevertheless are understood as symbolizing violence. Any sign, image, or other convention that has over time come to represent violence would be a symbolic violent moving image. As such, both ends of the continuum, real live violence and symbolic

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[31] Charles Sanders Pierce, *Collected papers of Charles Sanders Pierce*, ed. C. Hartshorne and P. Weiss (Cambridge: Harvard Press, 1931-1935).

violent moving images, are equally unmistakably about violence, yet strikingly different

in so many ways. These differences and similarities reveal the necessity of developing a

continuum of violent moving images that allows a deeper understanding of the imagery

under discussion in the chapter that follows.

Conclusion

Indexical violent moving images, while mediated, become reliable historical

records and can be understood as appealing for their potential edificatory power. Thus,

the allure of indexical violent moving images is relatively clear. In contrast, symbolic

violent moving images are alluring because they provide a safe but thrilling ride wherein

violence serves the story and characters, and not the other way around. Thus, an appeal

to narrative, plot, and characters explains the allure of symbolic violent moving images.

However, realist violent moving images, especially those of strong violence, provide

neither authentic records as indexical violent moving images do, nor the superficial fun of

symbolic violent moving images. The allure of realist strong violent moving images

cannot be explained solely by appeals to edification or entertainment, historic traces or

narrative tools. The allure of realist violent moving images of strong violence must also

be because of something revealed by the violence itself, but this creates a dilemma or

paradox. Audiences are attracted and pleased by what is otherwise unpleasant or

disturbing. In Chapter 3, I explore the possible explanation that the allure of realist

violent moving images of strong violence lies in an experience that affords audiences

some manner of catharsis. Symbolic violent moving images are sometimes explained as

alluring or entertaining because of the thrill or emotional rollercoaster they provide.

Chapter 3 reassesses the concept of tragic catharsis in an attempt to determine if when

modernized, clarified, and reformulated, it can provide explanatory strength about the

allure of realist strong violent moving images.

CHAPTER 3

REASSESSING THE CATHARSIS HYPOTHESIS

Preliminary Remarks

"Some years later, when the number of lynchings subsided, a white resident of Oxford, Mississippi, told a visitor that lynching still had a reaffirming and cathartic quality that benefitted the entire community."[1]

Graphically violent media like realist strong violent moving images are sometimes defended on the grounds that the experience of engaging with these images or stories results in a pleasurable cathartic release of otherwise potentially dangerous emotions. However, people are often confused or unclear about what catharsis is and how exactly catharsis is supposed to happen. This uncertainty is evident in the debate between interpreting catharsis as therapeutic or interpreting catharsis as educational, and particularly apparent when reviewing discussions of Aristotle's brief use of the concept in the Poetics. One way to clarify the ambiguity is to understand catharsis more holistically as a complex of interrelated processes and unique situational elements. The benefits of catharsis cannot be achieved by exclusively purging or exclusively clarifying emotions, and is further misunderstood when interpretations fail to account for the importance of the group dynamic. Catharsis is accomplished when there is a successful interplay and interaction of cathartic processes and group experiences. Catharsis is not wholly about purgation and releasing harmful emotions nor wholly about purification or clarifying emotions, but involves a complex and systematic method by which emotions are

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[1] James Allen et al., *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* (New Mexico: Twin Palms Publishers, 2004), 27.

heightened and aroused for contemplation and reflection in order to effect intellectual maturation and attitude change through group experience.

What is tragic catharsis? What 'goes on' during cathartic responses to dramatic images and stories? Can tragic catharsis be applied to realist strong violent moving images to explain the allure of viewing violence? I will attempt to answer these questions by exploring the important connections and interplay between the Aristotelian role of catharsis in tragedy, the function of catharsis in psychotherapy, and the phenomenon of catharsis in a modern cinematic example of realist strong violent moving images. Although not entirely germane to contemporary debates regarding violence in popular entertainment and mass media, Aristotle's treatment of catharsis in the *Poetics* is an appropriate starting point toward any discussion of the current implications of the cathartic response. However, since there is still debate concerning the role, or lack thereof, of catharsis in the *Poetics*, a brief groundwork is necessary. My aim in Chapter 3 is not to wholly refute the varied traditional definitions of catharsis, but to question the implicit exclusivity of these definitions and to offer another more complete explanation of what occurs during audience engagement with tragedies, and then to further apply that knowledge to the current discussion of the allure of realist strong violent moving images. As such, it will first be necessary to outline the traditional explanations of catharsis that derive from Aristotle's *Poetics*, for example, as a homeopathic or allopathic medical somatic therapy, or as emotional or intellectual cognitive education. The primary text I use for my exegesis of Aristotle will be Elizabeth S. Belfiore's discussion of catharsis in *Tragic Pleasures: Aristotle on Plot and Emotion*, and, the *Poetics* itself. It will become

evident that none of the common definitions of catharsis derived from Aristotle's work are alone explanatorily adequate to clarify what happens during our engagement with tragic images and stories, both ancient and modern, but that each includes relevant insight into the fuller holistic cathartic process.

Following this foundational discussion and critique, what follows below elucidates the parallels between the importance of the group dynamic in Aristotle's conception of catharsis in tragedy and the use of the group dynamic in psychotherapeutic catharsis. There is a distinction in psychotherapy between group and individual catharsis, which furthers the discussion regarding the important role of the group dynamic in tragic catharsis. My analysis of psychotherapy will derive primarily from Michael P. Nichols' and Melvin Zax's *Catharsis in Psychotherapy*. A discussion of the use of catharsis in psychotherapy can offer new explanatory power into the role of the group dynamic as it functions in catharsis both in the stricter Aristotelian form and in the broader catharsis hypothesis that implicitly is applicable to any type of moving image. Next, this chapter takes a more contemporary look at the role of catharsis by applying a clearer understanding of the catharsis hypothesis to specific realist strong violent moving images in the film *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*. Finally, it seems unwise to address the issue of catharsis without placing it in the context of discussions of the potentially beneficial role of catharsis in modern society. Failing to discuss whether tragic catharsis has modern moral and social import is to only address half the issue and overlook major social concerns. The final discussion of this chapter will address the possible usefulness of catharsis in mitigating aggression and violence. Once this is accomplished, tragic

catharsis will be defined more clearly and accurately, its process understood more

completely, and its applicability to the question at hand tested; that is, can catharsis

account for the allure of realist strong violent moving images?

<div align="center">Tragic Catharsis</div>

Aristotle uses the term catharsis only briefly in the *Poetics*, but tragic catharsis

has been interpreted in a number of different ways from the brief occurrence of the

concept in Chapter 6 of the *Poetics* when Aristotle proffers his definition of tragedy:

> Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is admirable, complete and
> possesses magnitude; in language made pleasurable, each of its species
> separated in different parts; performed by actors, not through narration;
> effecting through pity and fear the purification [katharsis] of such
> emotions.[2]

In the interest of completeness, this chapter will not address every theory of tragic

catharsis; for example, the cathartic process is sometimes interpreted as effecting the

characters within the drama or the narrative structure itself. However, I will not be

discussing specific theories that interpret tragic catharsis in this way since their relevance

to the question of the allure of viewing violence would be merely supplementary. Rather,

this discussion of catharsis will specifically focus on the emotional response(s) of the

spectator or audience of tragic drama. On this account, Aristotle's tragic catharsis is

commonly interpreted as either therapeutic or educational, a distinction which is often

understood as physical versus cognitive, medical versus intellectual, or purgation versus

clarification.

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[2] Aristotle, *Poetics* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), 10.

The term catharsis, much as the word violence, is often used in everyday conversation; therefore, it is important to understood catharsis as derivative of the Aristotelian use of the concept while still maintaining its modern social connotations. When used everyday, catharsis typically refers to the purification or purgation of emotions that leads to some sort of release from tension or anxiety. Further, the implication is that the purged emotion is more deeply understood by the consciousness as the result of affording it expression. Overall, catharsis is a method or technique associated with the relief of tension and anxiety through some form of cleansing of the emotions physically or emotionally. Implicit in characterizations of catharsis as relief or release is the consequence of deriving pleasure or education from the overall cathartic response. Interestingly, even in the colloquial sense the distinction between a medical, somatic, and therapeutic cathartic response and an emotional or intellectual cognitive, educational cathartic response becomes evident. Still, though the varied colloquial definitions of catharsis are not very different from the traditional interpretations of catharsis in Aristotle's works, this chapter is specifically discussing tragic catharsis.

It is important to remember that what will be discussed in this chapter is tragic catharsis; more expressly, a discussion of catharsis as interpreted from its use in Aristotle's *Poetics* as some form of emotional or cognitive response to dramatic performances or imitations. When the discussion shifts to include more contemporary forms of entertainment or imitation, catharsis refers to emotional or cognitive responses to realist strong violent moving images. Nevertheless, catharsis in this paper does not refer to behavior such as smashing your steering wheel because a car has just cut you off,

or slamming a door in frustration after a fight over visiting in-laws. Unless otherwise noted, catharsis refers to tragic catharsis, that is, emotional or cognitive responses to dramatic imitations presented seemingly for entertainment purposes, for example, realist strong violent moving images and not indexical or symbolic violent moving images. That is, catharsis refers to verbalization, thought, and feeling, not physical action or physical expression.

<div align="center">Therapeutic Tragic Catharsis</div>

Aristotle's definition of tragedy specifically refers to the excitation of the emotions of pity and fear, and within Aristotle's philosophy tragedy involves imitation which in turn leads to learning and therefore also to pleasure.[3] Thus, tragedy effects the emotions of pity and fear for the consequence of pleasure and learning. Therapeutic catharsis is primarily and typically associated with pleasure derived from purgation or cleansing, and is as a result often couched in medical metaphors; for example, the spectator has an illness, an inclination toward pity or fear, which needs to be cured. However, there are two prominent therapeutic theories, homeopathic and allopathic, that each proffer different explanations as to how the purgation, purification, or curing of the illness is supposed to occur. First is the homeopathic theory wherein pity and fear are purged by emotions like themselves, pity and fear. Second is the allopathic theory wherein pity and fear effect the purging of emotions unlike themselves such as anger or

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[3] Among other places, Aristotle, *Poetics* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), 6-7.

lack of compassion.[4] It will become evident that the homeopathic and allopathic

interpretations of what occurs during tragic catharsis are inaccurate and incomplete, but

to understand why these two unilateral interpretations are inadequate, and why a more

complete conception of catharsis is necessary, we must first understand how they are

supposed to work and where they fail to be explanatorily adequate.

According to the homeopathic theory there is an inclination toward feeling pity

and fear which when left unattended leads to potentially harmful or detrimental behavior;

for example, an inclination toward fear will lead to fear in the heat of battle, or an excess

of pity will lead to a certain level of weakness in interpersonal business relationships.

Therefore, according to the homeopathic theory of catharsis, the inclination toward

harmful emotions such as pity and fear is driven away by an overdose of pity and fear. In

Oedipus the King, Oedipus inadvertently murders his father, marries his mother,

discovers what he has done, leads his mother to suicide, stabs out his own eyes, and

consequently exiles himself. For a number of reasons, a spectator of the Oedipus tragedy

is invited to overindulge in pity and fear. Spectators pity Oedipus because he is

overcome by that which is greater than himself, fate, but also suffers innumerable

physical horrors. Spectators then experience fear themselves by recognizing how likely it

is that tragic things can just as easily and uncontrollably happen to anyone, including

them. Audience members might gasp, cry, or shutter at the tale of Oedipus in a way they

have never done before, that is, they feel an excess of pity and fear during their

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[4] Elizabeth S. Belfiore, *Tragic Pleasures: Aristotle on Plot and Emotion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 261.

engagement with the story. Presumably, when these emotions of pity and fear are excited regularly in the theatre then they are weakened and thus less likely to be aroused in real life. The spectator has had, for lack of a better description, a good cry and a good scare and therefore purged or cleansed unwanted emotions or inclinations out of his or her system.

While the homeopathic view is ostensibly a decent account of the experience of engaging with a tragic drama, there are some difficulties with accepting the theory as wholly explanatorily adequate and as theoretically accurate. First, the overdose metaphor is misused and misapplied; as Belfiore rightly recognizes, "most people would agree that, in their own experience, tragedy seems not so much to relieve a preexisting excess of pity and fear as to arouse these emotions in which we are usually deficient."[5] While many people are irrationally afraid of spiders or public speaking, it seems contrary to common experience that we typically encounter people walking around with an excess of pity and fear who are all too likely to feel heartache for those less fortunate than themselves or to drive more slowly for fear of an accident. If anything, excessive emotions of pity and fear lead to compassion and cautiousness, not in and of themselves detrimental traits, and not necessarily in abundant supply in society. Additionally, though, there are theoretical difficulties with the medical, vaccination metaphor and overdose description that raise questions about the accuracy of the homeopathic theory.

The homeopathic theory usually employs the medical metaphor of inoculation, but upon review vaccination is more in keeping with an allopathic interpretation wherein

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[5]Ibid. 272.

pity and fear affect the catharsis of emotions unlike themselves. During flu season, it is

unadvisable to administer an overdose or large quantity of the flu virus into the body.

Introducing an overdose of influenza would lead to a proportionally greater incidence of

the virus, and an infection of an illness that might not have occurred otherwise. Instead,

patients are given a small minute attenuated dose of the influenza strain which allows the

body to slowly develop defensive antibodies to the virus. While the initial injection

introduces something similar to the illness into the body, it is the antibodies, which are

unlike the original illness, that actually effect the cure. Thus, if we work through the

medical metaphor the overdose theory seems inaccurate since introducing an excess

would in principle lead to more excess not a relieving, purgation, or curative effect. Like

(fear, etc.) seems not to effect like (fear, etc.) as purgative or cleansing but piggybacks on

what is similar and leads to an increase of that which it is like (fear, etc.). However, the

misconception is a common one since excess in medicine is often associated with

resistance; for example, anyone who has suffered through an excessively itchy but non-

lethal bout of chicken-pocks is typically immune for the rest of their life. Consequently,

either an overdose or a small dose of an illness may vaccinate an individual but in both

instances it is the development of the opposite or antibody of the disease that fights the

original illness, and this process seems wholly allopathic not homeopathic.

An excess or overdose of pity and fear would seem not to lead to a purgation of

the like emotions of pity and fear as implied in the homeopathic theory. However, since

Aristotle's definition of tragedy explicitly involves the excitation of pity and fear, these

emotions must play a prominent role in tragic catharsis even if they do not rid us of pity

and fear themselves. A second interpretation of therapeutic catharsis, the allopathic,

appears more in keeping with the medical metaphor but functions to eliminate harmful

emotions in a different way while still being catalyzed by the arousal of pity and fear. On

the allopathic theory pity and fear are aroused by tragic drama, but pity and fear purge

emotions unlike themselves. Still using the medical metaphor we could summarize the

process as follows: first, there is a preexisting unhealthful condition due to an excess

(aggression, for example); second, an emotion with an opposing excess power to

aggression is administered (fear, for example); third, the emotion of fear is felt

throughout the body and causes a disturbance because of its excess; fourth, it reacts with

the opposing excess, aggression; fifth, the fear itself passes out of the body carrying with

it the preexisting, opposing excess of aggression that impedes a healthful mixture and

proportion in the body; sixth, the removal (catharsis or purgation) helps restore a healthy

symmetry of the opposing emotions of fear and aggression that is proper to the body's

nature.[6] Following this account, the allopathic interpretation is more in keeping with the

vaccination theory and more accurately accounts for the purging of the common excesses

as they manifest in, and harm, society, that is, anger, aggression, lack of compassion, and

so forth.

  The allopathic interpretation still accounts for the use of pity and fear Aristotle

finds so relevant but allows the cathartic process to deal with the varied emotional

deficiencies in society which extend far beyond pity and fear. Additionally, the

allopathic view aims more at symmetry of the emotions since it seems, and I believe

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[6] Ibid. 311.

Aristotle would agree, that the final goal is not to temporarily cleanse or purge the body

of all of a certain emotion until it slowly rebuilds, but to have a correct proportion of each

emotion. We should not have an excess or deficiency of fear just like we should not have

an excess or deficiency of rashness, and it is through allopathic therapeutic catharsis that

audiences of tragic catharsis achieve this balance. However, the allopathic theory of

catharsis shares a fundamental problem with the homeopathic theory of catharsis;

namely, that neither the homeopathic nor the allopathic interpretation of tragic catharsis

fully accounts for a substantial and lasting change in attitude or intellect. For this

important function it is necessary to look to the essential role fulfilled by the process of

educational tragic catharsis.

<div align="center">Educational Tragic Catharsis</div>

The homeopathic and allopathic theories of tragic catharsis are far too focused on

pure release or purgation of emotion and neglect the important role of profound self-

reflection, contemplation, and education. Although recognition is implied in therapeutic

catharsis, for example, recognizing the horrors of Oedipus and one's potential to suffer

the same ills, therapeutic catharsis is at its heart about an emotional, somatic purging and

less about any cognitive, reflective reasoning. Luckily, intellectual catharsis can function

to supplement the therapeutic account by focusing on the cognitive aspects of catharsis,

and we can begin to see how the therapeutic and educational cathartic methods work best

as interrelated parts rather than as exclusive processes. Homeopathic and allopathic

tragic catharsis both theoretically result in the beneficial consequence of pleasure by

relieving tension, anxiety, and weakness caused by inclinations to pity and fear, but these

results are temporary. Implicit in therapeutic catharsis are a lack of profound self-reflective contemplation and thus a lack of real knowledge being gained from the experience. Therapeutic tragic catharsis is all about being overwhelmed by the experience, and while this can effect attitude changes, it seems to be short lasting. This temporary relief or purgation is why audiences must regularly return to the theater to purge again and again as harmful emotions slowly boil-up within. If the lesson or curative process can be more concretized then tragic drama will have a more beneficial and long lasting result, and this is what educational or intellectual tragic catharsis seems to emphasize and achieve.

While therapeutic and educational catharsis both involve pleasures that would account for the allure of realist strong violent moving images, educational catharsis involves a different source of pleasure, that is, the pleasure derived from learning and intellectual growth. On the educational catharsis interpretation the emphasis is on reflection, reasoning, and knowledge. Following this new account, when confronted with the tragedy of Oedipus a spectator might go through the following steps: first, he or she recognizes that Oedipus suffered destructive, painful, and shameful things when this was not expected; second, he or she next reasons that Oedipus is greater than, or at least similar to, himself and thus he or she too has the potential to suffer as Oedipus suffered; third, he or she fears suffering destructive, painful, and shameful things. And/Or: first, he or she recognizes that Oedipus suffered destructive, painful, and shameful things such that he or she might also suffer; second, Oedipus, like him or her, does not deserve to suffer; third, he or she pities Oedipus. Finally, the spectator or audience member

contemplates, recognizes, and understands that this plot is an imitation of something he or she has seen before, and that all mortals are such as to suffer destructive, painful, and shameful things. [7] Thus, through the cathartic process there arises the pleasure of learning even though what is learned is not all that pleasant.

With educational tragic catharsis an audience member does not feel better as a result of purging or exhausting a certain emotion, in fact he or she might feel worse emotionally by recognizing the potentially horrible and uncontrollable things that may happen to him or her, but he or she have instead grown intellectually in a lasting and profound way.[8] The viewer has undertaken a personal exploration of attitudes, feelings, and the self; "Tragedy imitates us, and thus provides us with a mirror in which we can come to know ourselves…tragedy teaches us to know ourselves as human beings. This knowledge is most difficult, and most pleasant."[9] The spectator no longer needs to return to the theatre to learn the same lesson again and again, but they return to the theater to continue their intellectual growth and personal understanding through profound self-reflective contemplation. Any lesson or attitude change has been concretized in a way that does not occur through merely purging emotions as emphasized in therapeutic catharsis. A solid foundation for future social, ethical, and personal maturing has been

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[7] Ibid. 349-350.

[8] This overall positive experience or pleasure is similar to what Susan Feagin terms the "meta-response" to tragedy in which the real pleasure of tragedy is not a result of the direct response to fictions, but as a result of a secondary positive meta-response that compensates for the negative direct response to tragedies. For more, see Susan Feagin, "The Pleasures of Tragedy," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 20 no. 1 (January 1983): 95-110 and "Monsters, Disgust, and Fascination," *Philosophical Studies* 65 (1992): 75-84.

[9] Ibid. 81.

laid, which will then be continually built upon. Still, this educational process could not have occurred without an initial phase of emotional excitation and arousal aimed at shattering and revealing previously held beliefs about the self.

There are difficulties with exclusively holding any of the tragic catharsis interpretations outlined above. First, the assumption in homeopathic tragic catharsis that audiences carry around or bottle up pity and fear seems inaccurate. Additionally, pity and fear do not seem to be harmful emotions in need of purging, nor do they seem to be purged by like emotions as supposedly occurs in homeopathic catharsis. Second, the allopathic view solves the theoretical problem of like not effecting like in the beneficial way typically implied, but both the homeopathic and allopathic interpretations fail to affect lasting results because they fail to include in any substantial way a reflective, educational component. So, it is necessary to look to educational catharsis for the missing part of the overall process; however, educational catharsis cannot be achieved without the arousal and excitation of emotions that initially occurs during therapeutic catharsis. If an audience member is not confronted with emotions in excess as they are when engaging with a tragic drama, and as they typically will not be outside of the theatre, viewers of realist strong violent moving images have no reason to confront their inner emotional life in a new and intellectually maturing way. It is parts of both the therapeutic and educational accounts of catharsis that contribute to the process of tragic catharsis by interacting with each other to effect attitude change. However, there is a key experiential element that is implied in tragic catharsis but is often left unexplained: the

group dynamic. It is necessary to account for the final important component to the whole of the cathartic process, that is, the significance of the group dynamic.

<div style="text-align:center">Psychotherapeutic Catharsis and the Group Dynamic</div>

Tragic catharsis is not exclusively therapeutic or exclusively educational. Each process, though, plays an important role toward effecting attitude change and intellectual maturation. For example, emotions must be excited and aroused in a way in which they have not been before, as they are during the process of therapeutic medical, somatic catharsis; and, the emotions must be reflected upon and understood in a deeper and more meaningful way than they have been before, as they are during the process of emotional or intellectual cognitive educational catharsis.[10] Additionally, though, substantial change will not take place unless the cathartic process occurs within a group dynamic. The audience or group is integrally important to the process of tragic catharsis because, even though the change is an individual one, the full cathartic response cannot be achieved individually. To understand the importance of the group dynamic it is pertinent to look to the process of psychotherapeutic catharsis.

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[10] It might appear as if I am privileging rational mental processes over somatic or bodily experiences. A critic, such as Martha Nussbaum, might call attention to the idea that human maturation and edification can occur as a result of narrative fictions and what we might call narrative reasoning from engaging with fictional stories rather than discursive reasoning while engaging with stricter forms of arguments. I believe Nussbaum's view is largely correct, and that both mental and bodily interaction with realist strong violent moving images affect maturation and the overall experience of the viewer. For more, see Martha Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

Group psychotherapy originated from the Greek drama,[11] and so parallels between the two are obvious. Still, the group dynamic plays an integral role in effecting attitude change and must be understood as a part of the complete cathartic process. Psychotherapists often view group and interpersonal interactions as "the definitive mechanism of change,"[12] and there is a very prominent distinction between group and individual psychotherapy. During individual therapy sessions the patient typically regards the therapist as a safe confidant; a therapist will not judge or condemn a patient's behavior or emotions and is typically supportive and consoling. Fear, anger, and other emotions can be expressed or purged however the patient feels is most natural with little threat of reprisal or disapproval. However, some doctors find that cathartic therapy is much more successful and profound when the cathartic process takes place within a group. A group will not be as forgiving or as predictive in its responses as a therapist or doctor. Within a group, anxiety is proportionally higher because the emotions of each member of the group will contribute to the overall attitude of the group. The group is less static and more unpredictable than a therapist, thus the patient must react to a number of people without the security of knowing how they will react in return. In this context, venting emotions is generally more frightening but also more powerful.[13]

Wild and uncontrolled emotional excesses will not be tolerated for long within the group, but they will be the initial catalyst for change, much as they are during the process

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[11] Michael P. Nichols and Melvin Zax, *Catharsis in Psychotherapy* (New York: Gardner Press, 1977), 66.

[12] Ibid. 65.

[13] Ibid. 66.

of therapeutic catharsis. The group will provide modeling behavior for the individual by forcing them to react to various other attitudes until the entire group has found its own equilibrium. This symmetry within the group is a macrocosm of the symmetry aimed at within the individual as discussed above in the allopathic cathartic response. Thus, the patient must quickly understand and take control of his or her emotions within the group, something he or she does not have to do, at least not in the same way, in individual therapy. Ultimately, the tragedy functions as a surrogate for the psychodrama in which patients are encouraged to act out their feelings. In the contemporary theatre, however, the actors become substitutes for the patient acting out or expressing his or her own emotions publically.

It is interesting to note, though, that within the psychiatric sciences there is a fascinating phenomenon that arose in the 1940's called an encounter group.[14] In an encounter group, non-patients gather together with or without the aid of a mental health professional and interact in the same interpersonal way by sharing, arguing, and so forth similar to what patients would do in a hospital or professional group therapy session. I offer the position that the modern theater experience functions much the same way as these encounter groups. The theatre environment is emotionally and intellectually similar to professional group psychotherapy, that is, while words and emotions are not necessarily explicitly or directly stated, the mood or attitude of audience members can often drastically effect the mood and attitude of other audience members.[15] As a result,

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[14] Ibid. 79.

attitudes are changed and emotional and intellectual growth takes place; however, a final

necessary element is that the individuals in the group/audience must sense a level of

safety during the cathartic process. In order for people to be comfortable feeling and

confronting emotional excesses they would not normally cultivate or engage outside of

the theatre, the theatre environment must create an atmosphere in which there is a certain

sense of security or anonymity. The group experience is emotionally and intellectually

frightening, understandably, and this is why the anonymity and security afforded by the

dimly lit modern movie theatre is an ideal location for tragic catharsis to happen.

Holistic Catharsis to, in, and from Realist Strong Violent Moving Images

A full and complete description or definition of the cathartic response to tragic

imitations must account for a number of processes and situations. First, the excitation or

arousal of the emotions of pity and fear in excess of that which is experienced everyday.

Homeopathic overdose theories of tragic catharsis acknowledge this important element,

but allopathic, antibody theories more accurately explain how excessive emotions are

purged or combated by using the inoculation, vaccination metaphor. However, the

effects of therapeutic catharsis are temporary and superficial and unless catharsis is

exclusively concerned with base pleasure release and emotional purging, which neither

Aristotle or I would agree with, then therapeutic cathartic theories inadequately describe

catharsis. Second, a reasoned reflection and contemplation on the imitation which

aroused specific feelings of emotional excess must occur for any substantial and lasting

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[15] For example, a screening of the *The Blair Witch Project* becomes increasingly scary as tension within the audience becomes palpable and reinforcing; however, the following screening becomes comical if fright and anxiety are not equally present in the majority of viewers.

educational growth or intellectual maturation to succeed. The educational theory of tragic catharsis accounts for this important element by emphasizing the need for reflection and understanding on a far deeper level than that described in exclusively therapeutic theories of tragic catharsis. Third, for enduring attitude change and intellectual growth to happen which further enables new knowledge to be carried into and applied to actual social interpersonal relationships, and new individual moral attitudes to have public relevance, the cathartic process must be undertaken within a group dynamic. Any individual cathartic process experienced in solitude will not include an interaction with the emotional responses of others that function to confront and destroy any individual biases and safeguards that might hinder the process of intellectual growth and emotional control. Emotions must be heightened and aroused for contemplation and reflection in order to effect intellectual growth, emotional understanding, and attitude change through group experience, and this holistic description or refinement of tragic catharsis more accurately and adequately accounts for a full and complete explanation of the tragic catharsis. By applying the full holistic catharsis model outlined above to modern realist strong violent moving images, it is possible to preliminarily test the applicability of the cathartic hypothesis toward explaining the allure or pleasure derived from viewing violent moving images.

Today, a popular form of entertainment in which a live audience engages with dramatic and tragic imitations that excite and arouse the emotions is the modern movie. Although the modern live theatre is closest in similarity to Greek drama, if we wish to talk about contemporary society we must talk about what imitations the majority of

society engages with, and this is film not live theatre. A complete account of the phenomenon of catharsis as it occurs during the modern movie experience must, as it must in any account of tragic catharsis, include a discussion of the complex interplay of a number of cathartic processes and situational elements. What occurs is a response to a specific tragedy or imitation that catalyzes emotional arousal and excitation in order to effect contemplation, reflection, and learning, as a result of the conscious and unconscious interaction of audience members within a group dynamic with a final concretizing of meaningful and lasting intellectual and educational growth or attitude change. Let us begin the transition toward discussing tragic catharsis within a modern context by working through the full cathartic process as it happens during modern tragic realist strong violent moving images.

First, we must single out an example of realist strong violent moving images. The fact based but fictional serial killer movie sub-genre often presents violent moving images of murder, mayhem, and terror. In addition, they often contain scenes that contain features or portray violence in all of the necessary ways outlined in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 to be sufficiently designated realist strong violent moving images. In fact, these films are sometimes the only place to gain information and knowledge about the harsh visual realities of un-glamorized violence for violence's sake. For example, *Man Bites Dog*, *Zodiac*, and *Monster* all strive not only for imitative accuracy because they represent natural impetuses or confirmed characters, but also to depict less glamorized accounts of the multiple tragedies resulting from the killing sprees of serial killers. A film from 1986, *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*, is an excellent example of the

imitative yet tragic story that is this violent sub-genre of the traditional dramatic suspense or mystery movie.

Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer follows Henry (Michael Rooker) from jail, to living with his prison friend Otis (Tom Towles), to a quasi-romantic relationship with Otis' sister Becky (Tracy Arnold). Later, the film turns darker as it portrays random murders by Henry and Otis, Otis' attempted rape of Becky, and finally Henry's murder of Otis, his escape with Becky, and presumably her murder at his hands. At the beginning of the film Henry is the quintessential ex-convict with a glimmer of likeability and quiet but uneasy charm. Henry's redemption, especially through his potential romantic and protective relationship with Becky is portrayed as worthy of cautious compassion. Nevertheless, it is a story that imitates a scenario many audience members have seen or heard before in newspapers, magazines, or news programs. The latest disappearance, found body, or gruesome murder by the person next door is always fresh in the minds of the audience, and so the final outcome of the film is not surprising or incredulous, however, decades of happy endings have numbed audiences to realistic conclusions as they hope against hope for the savior of the naturally and helplessly violent killer.

The tragedy of the film is that the audience knows the final outcome of film cannot be positive since Henry is shown murdering people without remorse throughout the film. Thus neither Henry nor the audience are unable to prevent the tragic inevitability of Becky's murder, and deep within the audience is a recognition of this helplessness to Henry's, Becky's, and Otis' fates. Henry, Otis, and Becky are doomed from the beginning of the film, and this is conveyed, however subtly, from the start of the

film. There is something much larger at work behind Henry's journey as he is propelled, seemingly against his will, hopes, or desires to ruin the lives of others, and any chance he has at happiness or redemption. Much like watching Oedipus the King, we know that this story cannot and does not end well, but as the audience we refuse to except that fate which is out of our control until the end of the movie drives home what we knew must happen all along. As such, the biggest surprise comes in the form of the audience's confrontation and revelations about the true nature of interpersonal corporeal violence. *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* uses unequalled amounts of atmosphere, realistic character motivations and reactions to violence, and complex character development to arouse an overwhelming level of pity, sadness, and hopelessness for Henry, Becky, and sometimes even Otis. *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* is a modern day tragedy drenched with realist strong violent moving images.

Second, we must understand and explain the modern group dynamic as it functions in response to the experience of watching *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*. Before the movie even begins, and as soon as the audience members sit down in their seats and the lights dim, they are afforded the safety and anonymity required to express emotions in a way they would not normally in an equally public setting. So, even though individual audience members are surrounded by complete strangers sometimes no more than inches away, the modern movie theater makes people feel comfortable enough to cry, laugh, shriek, and shout in a way they would never outside of the theater. Also, an audience typically enters the theatre with an atypical willingness to feel intense emotional states, a situation that is necessary for the group dynamic in psychotherapy as well.

Interestingly, the movie theater is in a sense a more powerful mechanism than the psychotherapeutic group because it encompasses a larger cross-section of the population but also somehow affords each of them a sense of security and comfort in releasing and feeling emotional excesses. From the outset, then, the stage has been set for the cathartic process to have a profound effect on the audience, and as Henry's story unfolds the audience is free to begin the tragic cathartic process.

Third, there must be an excitation and arousal of emotional excesses. Critics praised the movie and controversy surrounded the realist strong violent moving images contained therein; the film has been called scary, intense, powerful, and the best film of the year. *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* was, however, created to be intense and confrontational. The entire movie was meant to make audiences feel excessively uneasy, dirty, and shamefully voyeuristic while also excessively fearful, sad, and sympathetic. The movie opens with a gruesome murder crime-scene that instantly seems to mimic the classic slasher horror movie, but as the movie progresses finding comfort in familiar violent moving images dissipates, and toward the end, any comfort is non-existent. There is relatively little dialogue as the film follows Henry and Otis as they kill an electronics salesman and then steal a video camera that is then used to record their subsequent murders. Dispassionately, Henry watches as Otis vicariously relives his murders back home by watching the video of their torture and destruction. The story is honest to a fault and is not content to let the audience merely suffer the demented violence of Henry and Otis, but also the torment of Becky at the hands of her brother as *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* unrelentingly piles misery upon misery. By the end of the film the audience

has had an exhausting experience because where similar movies such as *Silence of the Lambs* or *Seven* will break up the dreary atmosphere and oppressive hopelessness with a quip or subtle recognition of the weight of the subject matter, *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* smacks of desperation in every scene leaving the audience begging for a break from the all too real dullness and punctuated violence. Thus, while the movie does not arouse fear in the same way bullets whizzing past the camera might, it arouses an unparalleled level of pity and sympathy for Henry and Becky who are destined for misery and ruin.

Fourth, any emotional purgation will be temporary and fleeting and so there must be a process that affords educational and intellectual growth or maturation. As the audience slowly confronts these excessive and new emotions in relation to violence and the agents of violence, they begin to recognize the tragedy as an imitation of actions they have seen before. In actuality, violent and horrific actions they most likely watched or heard about on the evening news that very same day since *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* is an imitation or mirror that reflects the past, the present, and the future. Spectators are forced to confront these images that shatter their own conceptions of violence and its participants because the film does not easily delineate characters into good and bad. Within the theater, the audience struggles to fit the frustration, anger, sadness, hopelessness, and overall helplessness of the characters with their own preconceived notions of what violence has been constructed to look like from symbolic violent moving images of good guy heroes and bad guy just desserts. The attitude of the audience has shifted over the course of the film, and even those audience members who

laughed out of nothing other than uneasiness at the beginning of the film no longer

dismiss the feelings that the film excites. In confronting these new perspectives,

spectators confront their own perspectives of violence and the human condition. *Henry:*

Portrait of a Serial Killer is especially affective in this respect because it offers extensive

and overwhelming insight into the unique human condition of a killer and his victims.

Upon leaving the theatre, a spectator of the movie has undergone an arousal of the

emotion of pity for a killer (Henry or Becky), and fear for his victims (Becky, et al) and

for him or herself at the hands of real monsters like Henry. Audiences have confronted

and reflected upon their emotions and their personal assumptions about violence and its

participants. As the spectator comes to grips with these new realities, he or she also

lessens the emotional excesses excited in the theater. Although the initial excessive pity

and sympathy is unpleasant, the way to relieve or purge these feelings is not to simply

release them but to confront and understanding them. We often feel better when we

understand why we feel badly; this is the release or purging we really strive for, that is,

the purging of ignorance. Further, when confronted with similar feelings we will not feel

the same anxiety and tension because we have a more profound understanding of

ourselves, and a greater control over these emotions. Thus, as the audience finally exits

the theater they transport this new attitude and intellectual maturity into the real world.

Granted, they are not completely new people with a whole new social outlook, but the

next time they see a news report or story of violence they will understand that reality in a

way they did not before the cathartic experience they had while engaging with the movie,

and the next time they engage a tragic imitation they will build upon the knowledge they gained from this cathartic experience.

Many ancient and modern tragedies arouse, excite, and purge emotions, but to hold an exclusive view of tragic catharsis neglects so many other important aspects of the cathartic process. Unless we are only concerned with superficial and temporary pleasure that has no lasting intellectual or personal effect beyond base pleasure, we must begin to consider the cathartic process as much more complex, we must begin to think of it as an interplay of a number of complex processes and situational elements, we must think of it as holistic. Catharsis is less about a method to purge pity and fear, and more about a way to understand and control these emotions, and then using that knowledge to engage the world in a more appropriate and mature manner. This benefit would be the real pleasure derived from realist strong violent moving images like the ones contained in *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*: pleasures that would explain the allure of viewing violence.

Catharsis, Aggression, Violence and the Causal Hypothesis Revisited

Can catharsis mitigate aggression and violence? The answer is yes and no. On the therapeutic homeopathic theory of catharsis it cannot; the inclination toward aggression and violence, like the inclination toward pity and fear, cannot be healed, purged, or stopped by introducing a similar or like emotional excess. Conversely, on the therapeutic allopathic theory of catharsis, excesses of pity and fear might account for a lessening of the inclination toward violence by introducing an excess of sympathy for those who suffer violence, and an excess of fear of having violence done to oneself. However, this revelation will not arise or be anything other than superficial and

temporary unless time is spent reflecting on the personal and social implications of violence; this is the contemplative process that is emphasized in accounts of intellectual or educational catharsis except that this confrontation will not occur if the experience or arousal of these emotions takes place alone or with like-minded viewers.[16] Of course, *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* can and is frequently watched alone on video and on the internet. In these instances, though, if the images, story, and feelings become too uncomfortable the viewer simply does not have to think about them, there is no push to confront excessive, uncomfortable, and powerful emotions. Further, if one is watching a movie surrounded by like-minded people, the audience or group dynamic will not function properly; for example, instead of confronting uncomfortable emotions a group of friends might laugh off movies aimed at arousing or exciting pity and fear as the students in California did in response to *Schindler's List*. So, the theory that catharsis and thus the mitigation of aggression and violence occurs during cathartic responses to violent moving images of all types is most likely incorrect because such experiences will typically provide nothing more than the superficial purging of base emotions without any intellectual growth or reflection since viewing realist strong violent moving images is typically not undertaken with the requisite conditions to facilitate change and education. Nevertheless, given the appropriate conditions, however rare, the pressure to engage in a complete cathartic process is difficult to ignore.

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[16] The important difference between private and public viewings should be recognized as applicable to all theories of the allure of violent imagery. It seems that in many cases if a viewer is not afforded the comfort and freedom to explore deep, complex, and often embarrassing and uncomfortable thoughts, emotions and feelings, deep engagement and thus profound change is not possible. This is especially the case with realist strong violent moving images, and might further undermine the explanatory strength of the catharsis hypothesis.

Can catharsis mitigate violence and aggression? The answer is no if we define

tragic catharsis or attempt to engage tragic imitations using exclusively therapeutic or

exclusively educational cathartic methods. The answer is yes if one undergoes the

complete holistic cathartic process as outlined above. That is, if the cathartic process

involves a complex method by which excessive emotional states of pity and fear are

heightened and aroused for contemplation and reflection in order to effect intellectual

maturation and attitude change through group experience. Such an experience, however,

seems extremely difficult and rare given the necessary conditions that must coalesce in

order to effect change.

<div align="center">Conclusion</div>

Many interpretations of tragic catharsis are far too exclusive and simplified. The

cathartic process is an extremely complex phenomenon that may only be completely

understood by mapping out personal experiences of the tragic cathartic process, but it is

also important to think about the modern context and social implications of a new holistic

view of tragic catharsis. What role can catharsis play in mitigating aggression and

violence? To answer this question we must look to glean information from the function

of tragic catharsis as arousing and exciting emotional excesses which then catalyze

intellectual growth and attitude change, but it seems we must also move beyond exclusive

and restrictive theories that inadequately and inaccurately describe tragic catharsis.

Returning to the allure of realist strong violent moving images, it becomes

obvious that tragic catharsis, even in its refined holistic and genre crossing formulation

seems an unlikely explanation for the powerful allure of violent moving images. First,

the phenomenological account above is more about engaging with characters, plot, spectacle and so forth; the same performance conventions that Aristotle focuses on far more throughout the *Poetics* than catharsis itself. As such, catharsis would account for the allure of all types of genres and sub-genres of moving images, but would not be adequate to explain the unique appeal of violent moving images. Why would someone attend a movie to feel fear, pity, and disgust when the same catharsis of fear and pity could be achieved from viewing a romantic tragedy?

Second, there are other film theories that might account for the appeal of films like *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer.* One such theory is Noël Carroll's concept of fascination with what he terms the art-horror monster.[17] While Henry does not fit the preliminary definition of monster by Carroll, in a dialogue with Berys Gaut in the "British Journal of Aesthetics" Carroll expands his initial definition to include what might be termed psychotic monsters that are so fanciful and unrealistic that to call them monsters is more appropriate than not; for example, Hannibal Lecter. Hannibal Lecter (Anthony Hopkins) in *Silence of the Lambs* is an amalgam of real life serial killers, but is altogether impossibly smart, well-mannered, and likeable to exist in the real world that serial killers inhabit. As such, while the fascination theory proffered by Carroll might explain the allure of *Silence of the Lambs* as something other than the allure of the violence contained therein, it would not account for *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* because of the way in which Henry is represented. Then, however, we return to the

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[17] See Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror; or, Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York: Routledge, 1990) and Aaron Smuts, "The Paradox of Painful Art," *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* Vol. 41 No. 3 (Fall 2007): 59-76 for comprehensive overviews.

conclusion that violent moving images are alluring because of the character and not the violence per se, and this is an insufficient explanation. Perhaps the catharsis hypothesis, even if possible, is inadequate to explain the allure of realist strong violent moving images without an appeal to some factor or feature of the moving images outside of the violence contained therein. Thus, the catharsis hypothesis might explain the allure of certain types of moving images or media, for example iconic violent moving images, it lacks explanatory strength in fully answering the question of the allure of realist strong violent moving images.

However, since edification seems a powerful motivating factor to undertake any endeavor, perhaps a reformulation of the notion of gaining knowledge, learning, or maturation is a hint in the right direction to explain the allure of realist strong violent moving images. In addition, the relationships between the characters onscreen and the individual audience members seems potentially fruitful and worthy of further examination. Possibly, more profoundly engaging with characters of realist strong violent moving images, in contrast to the plot or other audience members, enables a level of deep self-reflective contemplation and edification far beyond that achieved, if possible at all, by catharsis. Chapter 4 explores the edification hypothesis which posits identification, simulation, and empathy as the tools or methods to achieve edification, and this type of edification is the real allure of strong realist violent moving images.

CHAPTER 4

EMPATHY, AND THE EDIFICATION HYPOTHESIS

Preliminary Remarks

No doubt, moving images that depict or document violence elicit a unique

emotional response within the viewer quite unlike that which occurs when viewing non-

violent imagery. Analyses of the emotional response to film often rely on the

explanatory power of empathy; however, the concept of empathy as it relates to film

theory and in particular to realist strong violent moving images remains underdeveloped.

Empathy must be understood in both its traditionally developed weak sense and in a

traditionally ignored or underdeveloped strong sense. As I shall demonstrate below,

weak empathy can be understood as synonymous with the concept of simulation while

strong empathy is more aptly understood as the result of emotive mirroring and shared

consciousness. Besides offering explanatory power beyond simulation, emotive

mirroring and shared consciousness further provide a crucial moral component to

viewing violent film that enables the viewer to situate themselves in an ethically

appropriate way to the images. As such, empathetic interaction results in a more

profound edification and maturation than in cathartic responses to realist strong violent

moving images and thus might better explain the allure of viewing violence.

Simulation and Weak Empathy

Though the term empathy is freely used in everyday language, it is necessary to

provide at least a superficial definition from which to work. Although sympathy is

defined as having common or shared feelings, film theorists often draw a distinction

between it and empathy by defining the former as 'feeling for' and the latter as 'feeling with'.[1] Sympathizing or 'feeling for' someone seems to entail not feeling afraid of the murderous monster but feeling afraid for the person or character on screen being chased by the murderous monster, while empathizing or 'feeling with' someone seems to entail experiencing vicariously the thoughts and feelings of that individual. For example, I fear the murderous monster in the pitch black basement for the same yet imagined reasons the onscreen character feels afraid – death, darkness, the unknown, etc. – however, my experience is not communicated through actual extant objective inputs that the person's on screen would be; that is, there is no murderous monster in the theater, I am not standing at the top of the stairs leading down into a dark and ominous cellar, and I know this. Taken at this superficial level, sympathy and empathy serve to help explain our emotional response to film, however, empathy is supposed to facilitate some deeper understanding of the person or character on screen, weak empathy does not accomplish this objective.

Often, the process of simulation is used to explain the empathetic or emotional response to film. Simulation, though, fails to achieve in any substantial way the goals it purports to accomplish. In *Image and Mind*, Gregory Currie offers an account of simulation which I will briefly sketch-out for critique. Although simulation as understood by Currie does afford explanatory power, it fails to adequately explain the

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[1] This is the fast distinction Alex Neill makes in "Empathy and (Film) Fiction," *Post-theory. Reconstructing Film Studies*, ed. David Bordwell and Noël Carroll (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 175, and as discussed by Deborah Knight in "In Fictional Shoes: Mental Simulation and Fiction," *Philosophy of film and motion pictures: an anthology*, ed. Noël Carroll and Jinhee Choi (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing: 2006).

emotional response to violent film when 'strong empathy' takes hold of the viewer.

Thus, while simulation does get us to emphasize in the colloquial sense, I contend it is a

rather weak emotional connection to the person or character on screen, which also fails to

effect the explanatory power it professes to provide, namely, the ability to discern or

understand the person or character on a deeper level, to predict his or her actions, or to

explain or justify his or her actions. Further, we will see how simulation accomplishes no

real interplay between the character and the viewer, it merely plops the viewer as their

self down in the situation on screen. As such, simulation amounts to nothing more than

placing my self in the space or place of another allowing me only to understand how I

might react to the situation without providing any real insight into the consciousness of

the person or character on screen.

In Part II of Currie's book, entitled "Imagination", he focuses on fiction's appeal

to the faculty of imagination, and it is through an understanding of imagination that

Currie will develop his account of simulation. Imagination is a purpose built system

within the mind; therefore, Curie's examination is into what proper function imagination

serves. Because imagination serves important cognitive information gathering goals,

Currie believes we cannot simply concern ourselves with the origins or psychopathology

of the faculty of imagination, but we should also examine the purpose of its function, that

is, imagination holds important explanatory power into how we engage film.

Currie's 'simulation hypothesis' develops from the knowing-how theory. On the

knowing-how theory, I imagine myself in the place of the other and then see how I

respond, "I let my mental processes run as if I really were in that situation."[2] However,

Currie will claim that these mental processes run off-line as they are not derived from

their normal sensory inputs and behavioral outputs. The process of simulation is

supposed to provide a reliable guide to the mental states of others, for example, "I can

simply note that I formed, in imagination, a certain belief, desire or decision, then

attribute it to the other. Let us call the hypothesis that we do, at least sometimes, come to

a view about other people's mental states in this way, the *Simulation Hypothesis*."[3]

Through secondary-imagining, Currie contends that the process of empathetic

reenactment of a character's situation and the simulation of their mental states enables us

to "feel as the character feels."[4] Thus, simulation as Currie describes it fits nicely with

the definition of empathy wherein I feel fear, anger, hatred, and the like with the person

or character on screen. However, the language Currie uses and the quickly drawn

definition of empathy above hint at the error underlying this assumption. We not only

need to understand how we feel 'with' the people on screen as being our self in their

place, or in their shoes if you like, but also how we feel 'as' the person on screen, and, by

'as' the person I do not mean feel as they feel, but feel 'as' them in a moment of

transcendental shared consciousness. Feeling 'as' this other consciousness involves a

much deeper and stronger empathetic response which occurs through emotive mirroring

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[2] Gregory Currie, *Image and Mind: Film, philosophy and cognitive science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 144.

[3] Ibid. 145.

[4] Ibid. 153.

and shared consciousness with the person or character on screen, but which is also much more rare and involved than weak empathy or simulation.

Developing the Capacity for Emotive Mirroring and Shared Consciousness

Empathy is the key to understanding others and thus also the key to compassion, but in the colloquial sense empathy is simply a misused slogan. Typically described as simulation in aesthetics, this under defined weak sense of empathy is used to describe a means toward a better enjoyment of all sorts of media entertainment, violent moving images included. However, simulation or weak empathy amounts to nothing more than placing my self in the space or place of another, and this allows me only to understand how I might react to the situation without providing any real insight into the self-consciousness of a fictional character. Unfortunately, even interpersonal interactions between real people fail to amount to more than simulation or weak empathy. Strong empathy involves much more than this, it involves a sharing of egos or consciousnesses in moments of self-other-referentialty as the individual ego engages, mingles, and gives itself over to another ego. At the heart of the empathetic response is emotive mirroring and shared consciousness which entail a complex and involved effort at mirroring and sharing the ego of another. George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* discusses the notion of the unhappy consciousness which is the precursor and paradigm to emotive mirroring and shared consciousness. As the progressive result of other forms of consciousness and interactions between egos, unhappy consciousness allows an individual to learn from his or her own ego's self-referentiality how to engage in self-other-referentiality and ultimately a deeper level of empathetic engagement.

Unhappy consciousness, I believe, is a misnomer that contributes to it being understood as a form of self-consciousness that is merely an intermediary stage toward a more fulfilling unified consciousness. As such, it is under appreciated as a principal mechanism through which we learn to empathize in a significant way with other people. There is a vast difference between a superficial empathetic response manifest during engagement with characters in moving images, and a meaningful moment of emotive mirroring and shared consciousness between egos. The former merely plops the individual singular ego as the individual singular ego into the place of another individual singular ego. The latter involves a much more complex interweaving of consciousnesses at which time it becomes possible to profoundly understand the life of another. Unhappy consciousness is, no doubt, unpleasant, but it is as such as a means to developing a more mature moral understanding of others and a more satisfying inner life. Unhappy consciousness is not necessarily a state of awareness to flee from, but rather is the primary means through which we learn to engage in self-other-referentiality, a method that enables a fully formed and deep empathetic experience leading to moral growth, compassion, and ultimately pleasure. What we will find is that while unhappy consciousness is a disagreeable state of self-awareness to maintain, many of us exist there for only moments and then regress back to states of awareness that fail to account or reconcile our dualistic self-consciousness nor situate ourselves in an ethically appropriate way to other self-consciousnesses. It will become evident that unhappy consciousness functions to force a confrontation between, and then reconcile, the transcendental ego and the empirical ego, but also further functions to develop and expand that same capacity in

order for us to learn how to reconcile our individual ego with another individual ego.

What follows in this chapter is an exploration of how these phenomena may take place

and how the experience of a strong empathetic response to realist strong violent moving

images may result in pleasurable edification and thus provide a novel explanation for the

allure of viewing violence.

<div align="center">Undeveloped Self-Other-Referentiality or the Master-Slave Dialectic[5]</div>

Unhappy consciousness alone does not confer the capacity for emotive mirroring

and the ability to share one's consciousness, but it is the progenitor of such moments.

Inferring from Hegel's system, the master-slave dialectic and the stoical and skeptical

self-consciousness have already preceded the unhappy consciousness, and it is these

previous forms of self-consciousness and interactions between opposing egos that,

coupled with moments of unhappy consciousness, provide the bulk of experiences

necessary to understand how to accomplish a strong empathetic response. For this

reason, it is worthwhile to briefly explore the role the master-slave dialectic and the

stoical and skeptical self-consciousness play in developing the capacity for emotive

mirroring and shared consciousness.

A level of mutual dependence is implicit in the relationship between the master

ego and the slave ego, but at the core of the master-slave dialectic is inequity. However,

this interaction motivated by a need for self-certainty also functions as an illustrative

example as to how we may in the future learn to engage in a meaningful mirrored

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[5] There has been a lot written about the master-slave dialectic, and stoical and skeptical self-consciousness. This paper is not meant to give even a cursory analysis of them, but rather discusses them briefly in order to provide a relatively fuller context in which to explore the unhappy consciousness.

reflexivity of egos with our self and with others. As we move beyond the type of

solipsistic self-certainty that appears in Descartes' *Meditations* as the ego's existence is

proven in a vacuum, we begin to search for certainty externally, and when certainty in

sensuous objects is insufficient and unsatisfying, our self-conscious desires to move

beyond a relationship to itself and proceeds to engage in relationships and prove certainty

with others.

For Hegel, "self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it

so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged."[6] Self-consciousness

finds such a possibility in another ego, which it then tests in battle; "thus the relation of

the two self-conscious individuals is such that they prove themselves and each other

through a life-and-death struggle."[7] Eventually these moments of transcendental self-

other-reflexivity may lead the master ego to recognize its own subjectivity as there is a

dynamic interplay and mirrored reflexivity between master and slave such that the object

ego ceases to be a slave while the subject ego then necessarily ceases to be a master.[8]

Clearly there is a dependent relationship between one self-consciousness and another;

still, as of yet, there is not a mutually beneficial reciprocity but rather, as the name

implies, a disparate relationship between a master and a slave.

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[6] G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 111.

[7] Ibid. 114.

[8] Howard P. Kainz, *Hegel's Phenomenology, Part I: Analysis and Commentary* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1976), 83-86.

The section in the *Phenomenology* entitled "Independence and dependence of self-consciousness: Lordship and Bondage," provides a nice example of the preliminary interaction between individual egos, but any interpretation must accept that the relationship is strikingly unbalanced. Although each ego receives something from the other, the slave is condemned to be regarded as less than, and even given that this situation resolves itself later, it is still at its foundation based on an inequality and imbalance.

> The relation between Master and Slave, therefore, is not recognition properly so – called…The Master is not the only one to consider himself Master. The Slave, also, considers him as such. Hence, he is recognized in his human reality and dignity. But this recognition is one-sided, for he does not recognize in turn the Slave's human reality and dignity…And this is what is insufficient – what is tragic – in his situation.[9]

The figurative mirror is inherently flawed because what is reflected back at the master is not another transcendental ego that deserves respect, but an ego which is less than and serves the purpose of reaffirming the master's desire for self-certainty not the slaves desire for freedom. This disparity is eventually reconciled, but certainly not during the master-slave dialectic which is one's first encounter or confrontation as an immature consciousness with another ego. The capacity for self-other-referentiality has begun to develop, but the capacity for emotive mirroring and equitable shared consciousness is unrefined. The consciousness must mature so as to overcome the bias and combative nature of the master-slave dialectic, and for this it turns to stoicism and skepticism.

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[9] Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, trans. James H. Nichols, Jr. (London: Basic Books, Inc., 1969), 19.

The Retreat to Stoical and Skeptical Self-Consciousness

The master-slave dialectic provides the first foray into confronting another and contradictory ego, but not any sort of appropriate or meaningful reconciliation results. Still, the ego continues to attempt to reconcile the relationship between itself and otherness and as such it comes upon stoicism which offers the freedom and power it is searching for, and consequently skepticism which will continue to attempt to reconcile with otherness. However, given the power and comfort afforded by the position, it seems that "the Master can never detach himself from the World in which he lives."[10] As such, it becomes the slave's obligation to break from his own self-recognition as a slave and move toward the recognition of his own self-worth and a final unification of consciousnesses. Stoical and skeptical self-consciousness are retreats into the solitary ego as a result of the inadequate outcome of the master-slave dialectic. Stoicism and skepticism offer the slave the freedom and power withheld by the master, but also offer the master the chance to regain the power he has lost as the slave rebels. Thus, each ego turns inward, and while this is a satisfactory respite, it will not sustain them for long as the unpleasantness of the contradictory nature of self-consciousness tears at them from within.

For the slave, his freedom resides in the transition to the stoical self-consciousness; "the Slave tries to persuade himself that he is *actually* free simply by *knowing* that he is free-that is, by having the abstract *idea* of freedom. The *real* conditions of existence would have no importance at all: no matter whether one be a

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[10] Ibid. 29.

Roman emperor or a Slave, rich or poor, sick or healthy; it is sufficient to have the *idea*

of freedom."[11] The principle of stoical self-consciousness is that "consciousness is a

being that *thinks*, and that consciousness holds something to be essentially important, or

true and good only in so far as it *thinks* it to be such."[12] As such, no matter what

demands are made of the self, no matter what discomfort the corporeal body is subject to,

and no matter who inflicts such harm, the solitary ego is always free to be unaffected.

Skeptical self-consciousness is a further reinforcement of the power of the solitary

self, but also a reattempt at a unification or reconciliation with otherness.

> The sceptical self-consciousness desires to make this union complete by
> actively *creating* otherness, by actively concentrating on the determinate
> limitations of concepts, and *making* them disappear into their negative. In
> this way the sceptical self-consciousness hopes to acquire full experiential
> knowledge of the freedom of thought.[13]

However, just as the foundation of the master-slave dialectic is inequity, so too

the foundation of stoical self-consciousness is a retreat to the solitary ego, and the

skeptical self-consciousness is at its foundation an alienation from the world, that is, "this

new attitude culminates in Solipsism."[14] The ego has inadvertently returned to the lonely

self-certainty that begins many processes of introspection, but in so doing also reinforces

the self-contradictory nature of self-consciousness.

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[11]Ibid. 53.

[12] G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 121.

[13]Howard P. Kainz, *Hegel's Phenomenology, Part I: Analysis and Commentary* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1976), 94.

[14]Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, trans. James H. Nichols, Jr. (London: Basic Books, Inc., 1969), 54.

As Scepticism goes about its vocation of negating every determinate content that shows its head, and even of negating any negations that gain prominence – it cannot help but notice that it also has an empirical ego, and that this empirical ego is continually presupposing and coming into contact with ideas or entities which Scepticism had supposedly brought to naught. And so the otherness which it had purportedly brought under its compete control is continually making inroads upon the life of self-consciousness, and showing itself to be as yet unassimilated. The sceptical self-consciousness finds itself caught in a transparent self-contradiction.[15]

We cannot avoid the fractured self that is at the heart of our self-conscious nature. Stoical and skeptical self-consciousness reinforce the continued and inherent duality that remains unresolved, but will then also finally provide the impetus to challenge oneself in a moment of self-reflexivity as the empirical ego and the transcendental ego finally confront each other in the unhappy form of self-consciousness.

Confrontation and Reconciliation Between the Empirical and Transcendental Ego

Driven by the desire for self-certainty, alienated by the loneliness of the solipsism inherent in stoical self-consciousness, and unable to avoid through skepticism the paradox felt by the duality of one's inner world, the individual ego now confronts itself to find a resolution to its fractured self; "this *unhappy*, *inwardly disrupted* consciousness, since its essentially contradictory nature is for it a *single* consciousness, must for ever have present in the one consciousness the other also; and thus it is driven out of reach in turn in the very moment when it imagines it has successfully attained to a peaceful unity

[15]Howard P. Kainz, *Hegel's Phenomenology, Part I: Analysis and Commentary* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1976), 94.

with the other."[16] As such, the self continuously struggles to reconcile its divided self, the empirical changeable ego which is a construct of the bundled conceptions of sensuous attributes in all its manifoldness and the transcendental, unchangeable ego that is only vaguely understood as our essential self. It may be helpful to think of the metaphor of a mirror, literal and figurative, in order to explore the phenomenon of unhappy consciousness.

Hegel's notion of unhappy consciousness is delineated into three forms or stages. First, in my own experience, takes place as I realize that my reflection in the mirror, or more simply my empirical ego in whatever sense it comes to me, is not who or what I thought I was, and it certainly is not what I would vaguely call my essential self. There was, of course, always in the back of my mind the idea that there was more to me than the bundle of ideas that make up my empirical ego, but it was always an obscure notion. At this preliminary stage my essential self is something, I know not what, that I wish to understand but cannot grasp; that is, initially "the Unchangeable is an external, alien being, a transcendent "beyond" vaguely apprehended but hardly graspable."[17] I realize there is something more to me, but I cannot articulate it nor fully make contact with it other than to know it is different from my empirical ego.

Second, and most difficultly, is the phase of self-conscious confrontation that interestingly resembles the life and death struggle described in the master-slave dialectic.

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[16] G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 126.

[17] Howard P. Kainz, *Hegel's Phenomenology, Part I: Analysis and Commentary* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1976), 95.

In this stage I risk the safety and security of my empirical ego that I have lived with for so long by attempting to confront my transcendental self with the threat of shattering the reality of who I believe I am. At this stage I experience "the transcendental ego as not in any way dependent upon the empirical ego; that is, the transcendental ego remains an immediate and transcendent being, but the empirical ego also finds itself able to approach, and be recognized by, the real self."[18] This event mirrors the life and death struggle of the master-slave dialectic as I do not know if it is possible for both egos to reconcile in a unity, that is, I am unsure as I present my empirical ego to the transcendental ego whether I will be forced to abandon my old self in favor of this more essential self. In either case, I have no idea what this circumstance would mean for me; I believe this is as far as many people wish to come for fear of having to vanquish the self that they have clung to for so long. Still, if I am going to progress, I must face the possibility of destroying my own notion of who I am.

Third, I realize that there need not be a destruction of one of my competing egos; although they exist in a sort of uneasy tension, they can exist together. Therefore, my self "posits both a difference and a relation between the apparent and the real self but which equally recognizes the possibility and, ultimately, the necessity of their root identity."[19] Through this process I have learned to confront another ego, as I have to a lesser degree in the master-slave dialectic, but I have also learned to reconcile or unify

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[18] John Russon, *The Self and Its Body in Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 26.

[19]Ibid. 27.

two disparate egos without necessarily losing, subjugating, or dissolving one or the other. The unification of consciousness and self-consciousness follows from the interaction between egos. Further, though, this is the intricate process that will be mimicked in strong empathy as I learn to unify another ego with my own without subjugating or dissolving the other. During unhappy consciousness I have succeeded in engaging in a moment of self-referentiality or reflexivity at the risk of having to destroy one of two egos, and I will now transpose this method onto my interactions with others in moments of self-other-referentiality enabling a strong empathetic response and recognition forcing a relationship based on dignity not inequity.

Toward Understanding the Empathetic Response to Violent Moving Images

In the *Cartesian Meditations*, Edmund Husserl also uses the metaphor of mirroring to understand the empathetic process of constituting the Other. Again, to empathize in the colloquial sense is to attribute one's own feelings to another and to understand their motivations, experiences, and so forth as one's own. The empathetic sentiment allows the individual to not only think we know the feelings of another but to place ourselves in their space or place. In strong empathy or emotive mirroring, however, we engage in a more intricate interaction of inter-subjectivity and shared consciousness with the character or person on screen. In 'emotive mirroring', we do make the move to the place of the Other, but also constantly refer back to ourselves in a consistent reflexivity or 'mirroring' which continuously exchanges the perceived experiences of the alter ego with those of our individual ego. This self-referential behavior hints at the solipsism or egoism that is so pronounced in weak empathy, that is,

a singular move as individual ego to the place and space of the Other, but while "the experience of others must form *part* of my intentional life,"[20] it must not at the same time be solely my imagined experiences. Nevertheless, the self must become capable of distinguishing between its own ego and the alter ego, at once empathizing with the Other and maintaining its own individuality. This type of move is difficult, but the nature and methodology involved can be understood by exploring the dramatic arts.

Acting is in a sense the art of becoming someone else. Many times actors attempt to empathize or draw on their own experiences to impart a sense of familiarity to their characters and as such the actor more easily relates to the Other they are trying to become. A spectacular example of skillfully 'becoming' or 'mirroring' another is the rigorous processes of Japanese Nō drama actors who undertake an intermingling of consciousness in order to faithfully portray not only the motions, but the intimate hopes and desires of a character; nuances that are often left unarticulated in the play itself.

Modern actors often feel more in tune with their character given involved costuming or cumbersome and time-consuming cosmetic prosthesis's. For the Nō actor, though, the most important aid is the simply adorned character mask. Unassuming and unostentatious, the Nō mask is often painted with a simple ambiguous expression which offers little more than a general impression of a woman, demon, or warrior, but when worn by a proficient actor conveys volumes more. Prior to going onstage, a Nō actor performs the 'aesthetics of alterity' by ceremonially donning the character mask in the "mirror room" just off-stage. The actor stares through the mask's miniscule peepholes at

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[20] Joseph J. Kockelmans, *Edmund Husserl's Phenomonolgy* (Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1994), 279. My Emphasis.

the newly emerged reflection. Eventually, the actor's self-image and new reflected

image, or Other self, absorb one another to become a single existence transcending self

and Other.[21]

Far from mere imitation of physical movements, the process of becoming Other

demands greater skill and effort. An actor:

> Sees the image of the other in the mirror as himself in a moment of
> transcendental self-referentiality…sees himself as an image of the other
> that is in the mirror, exemplifying the intertwinement of self-referential
> transcendence and other-referential immanence…sees himself seeing
> himself as the other in a moment of transcendental-immanent self-other-
> referentiality.[22]

Zeami Motokiyo, the most prolific and famous creator of Japanese Nō plays,

characterizes another's actions and motivations for action as a stream of consciousness.

Actors must throw themselves into the Other's stream of consciousness and allow

themselves to be swept away by the current. Still, at every moment, an actor must remain

acutely aware of his own consciousness to free himself from the portrayal of the character

following the performance. An actor must be able to lose himself and save himself from

the Other's torrent of consciousness to effectively become him or her time and time

again. Therefore, technical knowledge of another's circumstances, history, and physical

environment are insufficient to lose oneself in the character's motivations, desires, and

dreams. It may be enough to imagine or simulate the on screen person's environment,

history, etc. in order to achieve a weak empathetic response, but 'strong empathy' and

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[21] Steven T. Brown, *Theatricalities of Power, The Cultural Politics of Noh* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 28.

[22] Ibid. p. 27.

true predictive and explanatory power of another requires much more, it demands an 'emotive mirroring' or inter-subjectivity and shared consciousness.

In further contrast to strong empathy, simulation or weak empathy runs the risk of failing to provide tools for clearly delimiting the Other as anything uniquely alien. Simulation defines what is clear and peculiar to the self, but not what is particularly the Other's. This is a distinction we must undertake because I do not want to, as I do in weak empathy, "apperceive the other ego simply as a duplicate of myself and accordingly as having my original sphere or one completely like mine."[23] Empathy must be carefully employed so as not to allow a confusion of the alter ego as all too simply a perfect reflection of ourselves. Still, "the body over there, which is nevertheless apprehended as an animate organism, must have derived this sense by an apperceptive transfer from my animate organism."[24] It is a delicate and complex interplay of consciousnesses that accounts of simulation or weak empathy leave underdeveloped.

By viewing accounts of identity through realist strong violent moving images, I psychologically and emotionally internalize another's actions, reactions, experiences, pains, loves, history, and so forth. This is possible because of the unique essential features of realist strong violent moving images discussed throughout Chapters 1 and 2 because I perceive the characters in realist strong violent moving images as responding to the world in much the same way I do or would, and it is the violence that heightens my recognition of our shared humanity. I am staring into the heart of a being that functions

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[23] Edmund Husserl, *The Essential Husserl: Basic Writings in Transcendental Phenomenology*, ed. Donn Welton (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999), 150.

[24] Ibid. 147.

autonomously, yet I reference all their behavior back to my own. "The 'Other,' according to his own constituted sense, points to me myself; the other is a 'mirroring' of my own self and yet not a mirroring proper, an analogue of my own self and yet again not an analogue in the usual sense."[25] I acknowledge their motivations for violence and reactions to violence, even if different from my own, as authentic and stemming from a faculty or mental make-up similar to my own. He or she are "an analogue of something included in my peculiar ownness,"[26] and what occurs is an intermingling of consciousness that further reinforces the existence of the Other. However, while the self must still become capable of distinguishing between its own ego and the alter ego, at once empathizing with the Other, the self must also maintain its own individuality to avoid the trap of Sameness and the complacency reinforced by simulation.

Emmanuel Levinas understands the Other as being awoken or cored out from the self. Any complacency toward identifying the Other as increasingly similar to ourselves must be unsettled "by the Other who tears this rest, who tears it from the inner side of the *state* where equality tends to settle…the Other in the same who does not alienate the Same, but precisely wakes him."[27] However, in only viewing my individual self in the place of another, I force my consciousness into their place. By experiencing the love, hate, anger, and fear of another we undertake unique avenues for individuating the Other, that is, awakening it from latency, but it is often only through engaging in the empathetic

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[25] Ibid. 138.

[26] Ibid. 149.

[27] Emmanuel Levinas, *Of God who Comes To Mind*, trans. Bettina Bergo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 59.

process in the strong sense that we profoundly rouse the Other from within ourselves and the experience becomes transformative of our own individual consciousness.

Empathizing ephemerally resituates our selves in the place and space of another while not grounding us permanently. To empathize is to briefly share the personal place of another, but to be capable of walking away from that space while retaining what has been learned from occupying that unique location. Unfortunately, many people decline from even attempting to share another's space in the more metaphysically sense. Through emotive mirroring and shared consciousness as a co-opted process of becoming we in a sense become the person or character on screen in the violent environment, we do not simply place ourselves in their position, and this is another reason why simulation as empathy fails, because it only accomplishes the latter. Finally, although Currie may disagree with this analysis, in simulation we are constantly attending to the imagining or belief with a parallel inhibitory process. While obviously the Nō actor is able to remove himself from the process of shared consciousness, his attending to his own consciousness does not play as prominent a role as it does in simulation. Simulation or weak empathy does not allow for losing oneself in the consciousness of the character or person on screen, it only allows for briefly imagining oneself as oneself in the place of another within a certain comfort level, and therefore lacks true explanatory power of another.

Application and Example

By now a number of questions may have arisen concerning the account of strong empathy that I have outlined above. For example, can strong empathy occur in a fictional film with fictional characters? In their discussion of empathy, inter-subjectivity, and the

Other, Hegel, Husserl, and Levinas were not referring to fictional characters which probably do not have a consciousness of their own in any real sense. Another question might be why is this discussion of empathy particularly relevant to realist strong violent moving images? The answer to the first question, I believe, can be revealed by examining two scenes of realist strong violent moving images that are by definition fictional. One in which only weak empathy is possible and the other in which weak and strong empathy are possible. The answer to the second question involves a discussion of a moral edificatory component, and the pleasure derived there from, hinted at earlier which is particularly relevant and derivative of realist strong violent moving images. So, let us address these concerns through an example and application of these terms to actual realist strong violent moving images.

So far we have been attempting to understand the empathetic process beyond that of simulation or weak empathy, however, I believe that it is beneficial to see how sympathy, simulation, weak empathy, strong empathy, emotive mirroring, and shared consciousness all play out in actual realist strong violent moving images. As such, it can be demonstrated how even if we engage in a sympathetic and weak empathetic response to symbolic violent moving images or realist weak violent moving images, and further allow that we can simulate the fictional person or character on screen, we still do not have a full account of the emotional response to realist strong violent moving images.

The example that I wish to explore is the film *Irreversible* by Gaspar Noé briefly

discussed above.[28] To reiterate, *Irreversible* is a film shown in reverse chronological

order about a young woman Alex played by Monica Bellucci, her boyfriend Marcus

played by Vincent Cassel, and her ex-boyfriend Pierre played by Albert Dupontel. It is

the story of Alex who goes to a party with her current lover and her ex-boyfriend and,

after leaving the party early, is raped in a road underpass. After leaving the party and

finding her bloodied and beaten body being taken away in an ambulance, Marcus and

Pierre search throughout the night to find her rapist, La Tenia, only to mistakenly

bludgeon the wrong man to death in an underground sex club. This murder, of course,

takes place at the beginning, not the end, of the film.

Initially, and starting from the opening/ending credits, the camera itself purposely

spins out of control slowly and briefly focusing on this or that continuously throwing

random images all over the screen. When we finally catch up with Marcus and Pierre

they are moving quickly throughout the dark club. The viewer is completely

disconcerted within the first five minutes of the film. Finally, Marcus and Pierre confront

two men, one of which we later learn is La Tenia, Alex's rapist. Mistakenly, though,

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[28] There are three important aspects of the viewing of realist strong violent moving images that
will not be covered in this dissertation but are revealed by an analysis of *Irreversible* and
extremely important and relevant to a complete understanding of the experience of viewing
violent imagery. The first important aspect is the affect of repeat viewings on viewer response.
The second important aspect is the affect of age and culture on viewer response. Finally, the third
important aspect is the affect of gender on viewer response. There is not sufficient space to
explore all of these important aspects, but for a fuller analysis of the impact of repeat viewings,
age, and culture, see Annette Hill, *Shocking Entertainment: Viewer Response to Violent Movies*
(Luton, United Kingdom: University of Luton Press, 1997), and for a fuller discussion of the
impact of gender on viewer response, engagement, and experience, see Carol J. Clover, *Men,
Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton: Princeton University
Press, 1992).

Marcus attacks the wrong man and, after losing the upper hand, is on the defensive.

Pierre forces his way through the crowd of onlookers and onto the screen and bludgeons

Marcus' attacker to death with a fire extinguisher. With each crushing blow of the heavy

metal fire extinguisher to the man's face, the image literally buckles as if in a rippling

effect extending out to the viewer. The attack continues as the man's face slowly caves

in and becomes unrecognizable. The scene is brutal and unrelenting as the only editing is

from visual effects and sound. The camera never cuts away, remaining stationary during

the murder and forcing the viewer to either sit through the violence without the emotional

break of cuts, edits, or shifts in perspective typically found in horror movies, or to look

away as if defeated by the gruesomeness of the image. This use of camera angle and

viewer perspective portends the unbearable rape scene to come.

The unedited murder scene lasts upwards of ten minutes and seems intended to

make the viewer feel physically ill and emotionally upset, it succeeds. However, much of

the feeling seems to come not from an emotional connectedness with the participants, but

from the interplay of camera positioning, visual effects, sound, and the circular

movement of images on the screen leading up to the murder. We have, at this point, no

real emotional commitment or connection to any of the characters because it is the

beginning of the film. So, while we no doubt feel something, we are not in any strong

sense empathizing with anyone in the image, the inputs that make us sick are real not

imagined, that is, the images, sound, and nauseating camera usage. We are sickened by

them, not by the violence; however, as was the director's intention, we accidentally

attribute these feelings of sickness as a reaction to the violence itself. The audience

believes that these emotions arise from empathy, simulation, or imagination, but they do not. One might be simulating the place of a witness to the violent act, which the camera angle is all too happy to provide, but these emotions do not arise from an empathetic response but a real physiological response. This response is what would most closely resemble the cathartic response discussed in Chapter 3; however, later in the film, our response to Alex's rape is quite different.

Later in the movie the viewer follows Alex as she leaves the party and encounters La Tenia in a tunnel running under a busy street. Alex is brutally raped for the next ten minutes and then beaten to near death during which time the camera remains absolutely motionless, positioned a few feet in front of Alex at ground level. Again, the viewer is forced to either witness the attack from beginning to end or turn away in a self-imposed edit we have become so accustomed to in popular movies. The only other person in the scene is a shadowy figure that emerges during the rape behind Alex and her rapist. He is at the opposite end of the tunnel where we, as witness, are positioned. This person watches for a minute or so and then leaves. This realistically depicted fictional scene of violence elicits a complex emotional response, specifically, a complex empathetic response. Sympathy, simulation, weak empathy, strong empathy, emotive mirroring, and shared consciousness all play out in this scene, and understanding how they occur will help us explain the variegated nature of the empathetic response.

Undeniably, we can sympathize with a number of the characters in this movie, for example, even while watching a scene he is not in, we can sympathize with Marcus' loss,

and identify with his anger,[29] this is, I believe, uncontroversial. Additionally, though, we can simulate a number of perspectives or physical positions. For example, I can imagine myself in the place of the person in the shadows or a person viewing the scene from the camera position. In fact, I think Noe intends us to do both. Further, I can empathize in the weak sense with the anger and sadness of Marcus and Pierre at the sight and thought of the rape of their loved one. That is, I am actually angry at the rapist and sad about the thought of a loved one being raped and beaten. I am not identifying with or sympathizing for the loss that Marcus feels, but I feel these emotions, while imagined, 'with' him. However, and most importantly, I can empathize in the strong sense with Alex, and it is this empathy which does not occur in all fiction film.

In order to empathize in the strong sense, that is, to engage in emotive mirroring and a sharing of consciousness; I must first be presented with a coherent consciousness to share in. The actor must provide a consistent Other and create the Other consciousness to be shared. So, initially the actor must undertake their own process of becoming similar to that described as it occurs in Nō drama; subsequently, the viewer is free to undertake a process of emotive mirroring and shared consciousness with the actor. The reason this occurs so rarely is, simply, that many actors are unskilled; physical imitation, manipulation of language, and facial expression amount to the bulk of their character portrayal. This confused consciousness is composed of parts, and the actor fails to commit to anyone, stuck between motivations for action and thought that they provide

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[29] For more see Carl Plantinga and Smith, Greg M., ed., *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition, and Emotion* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 200.

their self and the impetuses for thought and action the character would have. This

confusion mimics our process of 'weak empathy' when we feel 'with' the character as

our self instead of 'as' the character. In *Irreversible*, Bellucci does become a woman

who is raped, whether she becomes what the writer or director meant when they wrote

Alex's part is inconsequential. She is not herself, although part of her is there, but is

someone new who exists for a time as a completely new consciousness transcending her

own consciousness. She creates an entirely unique and coherent yet new consciousness

thus enabling us to undertake our own process of 'emotive mirroring' and shared

consciousness with this person. Bellucci, as Alex, imbues the film with a unique

consciousness that is not necessarily either wholly her own or wholly the characters but is

not hedged and incoherent as in most performances. While the availability of a coherent

complete consciousness is necessarily the case in non-fiction film because someone as

being their self automatically conveys as much, it is rare in fiction film because of the

varied skill of actors.

 In his account of simulation, Currie addresses how we often need to fill in various

inputs from our own experience since film rarely gives us everything necessary to

imagine a given situation. However, another consciousness is something which we

cannot imagine or create on our own. We are capable of filling in the input-gaps so speak

in fictional films, but only in the weak sense, it is not possible to fill in another's

consciousness unless it is given in the film itself, and this only occurs rarely in non-

fiction as it does by Bellucci in *Irreversible*. Now, assuming the actor effectively creates

this other consciousness which is then transposed onto the film itself, what is unique

about such a portrayal in violent film is the vulnerability imparted. Intrinsic and inherent human vulnerability takes center stage in violent film as opposed to non-violent film, and this is where the moral component of violent film becomes important, that is, in reinforcing the vulnerability and finitude of others.

The Moral Importance of Strong Empathy

Act of violence can be understood from a number of perspectives: the victim, the agent, the witness; we are capable of embodying all three or only one of these, for example, I can attack myself, be attacked, attack some else, or watch as someone is attacked. Realist strong violent moving images attempt to situate us in one of the three perspectives, and, as we have seen, also often ask us to move between them. However, as necessarily viewing the film, we are often assigned the status as witness to violence and asked to stand in moral judgment of it.

To his credit, Currie is not ignorant of the frequently asserted connection between violence and film, and does not entirely neglect the issue of morality, but, like the simulation theory itself, leaves it underdeveloped. Chapter 1 made clear that violent fictions are repeatedly associated with motivating or contributing to violent behavior, and at the end of his chapter on imagination Currie asks whether fictions can do moral damage. Currie contends that we typically run our belief-desire system off-line when viewing fictions which are therefore disconnected from action or behavior. This is the result of an inhibitory mechanism that prevents us from, for example, actually fleeing from the attacking lion on screen. However, pretend beliefs or desires might be brought,

for whatever reason, on-line during a failure of this inhibitory mechanism.[30] Although

pretend beliefs are often reinforced as being indeed pretend by empirical, sensory

evidence, pretend desires might not have such a defense. If viewers come to have the

immoral, dangerous, or violent desires of a fictional character (secondary imaginings),

why is so hard to believe that "we may be in danger of really acquiring those desires

through failure of the inhibitory mechanism."[31] In contrast to simulation and weak

empathy, the strong empathetic response to realist strong violent moving images resulting

from emotive mirroring and shared consciousness effects quite a different consequence.

Strong empathy helps to situate the viewer in a morally appropriate way, provided we

engage in the film beyond mere simulation.

Through empathy we situate ourselves in the place of another, to experience as

our own the pains, happiness, and vulnerability of the Other. As briefly addressed above,

other states of consciousness enable us to interact with people in a similarly close way,

but only strong empathy puts the subject in the place of another in an ethically

appropriate way. From this vantage point we recognize that the other perceives the world

in much the same way as we perceive it, not identically, but enough to formulate an

objective reality through concurring with others about our observations, thoughts, sights,

pains, and so forth. Strong empathy in response to violent film, however, has an

additional consequence which cannot be overlooked or taken too lightly. When we

experience the Other through strong empathy in violent film, we also recognize the

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[30]Gregory Currie, *Image and Mind: Film, philosophy and cognitive science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 162-163.

[31] Ibid., p. 163.

vulnerability of the Other as a correlate of our own vulnerability. This inherent

vulnerability is what is pushed to the fore in violent film by the very nature of the

imagery. The function of strong empathy beyond weak empathy or simulation is the

ability to constitute, delimit, and implicate our self by our self to a responsibility to the

well-being and respect of the Other. Thus, empathy is what is required for maintaining

balanced ethical obligations. It is an acknowledgment in a Kantian sense of the intrinsic

value of others, but also an acknowledgment and edification of their and our vulnerability

and finitude.

Conclusion

The pleasure, and thus allure, of viewing realist strong violent moving images can

be explained by appeals to the pleasure of moral edification, edification that can only be

achieved or at least particularly heightened through viewing realist strong violent moving

images. Watching movies such as *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* or *Irreversible*

enable us to develop the ability to empathize with the real people we interact with

everyday without merely mapping our consciousness onto theirs. It is, of course, possible

to extend this analysis to indexical violent moving images, but given that emotive

mirroring and shared consciousness occur in fictional violent moving images, it is also

given that they occur in non-fiction since the primary necessity, a coherent

consciousness, is already present simply in virtue of the real being present. We are

almost automatically situated in an ethically appropriate way because the consciousness

and vulnerability is imbued on film instantaneously.[32] However, since many of us will

not witness, experience, or watch the violence that non-fiction violent moving images re-

present, we must in some way gain access to an understanding of our responsibility to the

vulnerability of others. The empathetic response to realist strong violent moving images

allows us this access provided we move beyond a weak and superficial empathetic

response to one of strong empathy through emotive mirroring and shared consciousness.

Unfortunately, while catharsis and edification both provide possible explanations

for the allure of realist strong violent moving images, their applicability is not exclusive

to realist strong violent moving images. Additionally, solely relying on the cathartic

hypothesis or the edification hypothesis seems to account for the allure of realist strong

violent moving images without substantial appeal or reference to violence per se. As

such, although Chapters 3 and 4 have provided adequate answers, they succumb to the

same mistake of other philosophical analyses of viewing or engaging with violence; that

is, these accounts seem to neglect the material soul of violence: pain, suffering, harm,

unpleasantness, and so forth. Must the allure of violence always be explained by

reference to something outside of violence simpliciter? An aesthetics of violent moving

images requires more; therefore, Chapter 5 represents a concerted effort to explain the

allure of viewing violence, in particular realist strong violent moving images, as an

aesthetic pleasure derived from violence per se.

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[32] While moral edification is afforded by indexical violent moving images, this does not mean
that the experience of self-inflicted violence outlined in Chapter 5 is also afforded by indexical
violent moving images. While we may share the consciousness of victims in indexical violent
moving images, indulging our own need for self-inflicted violence becomes impossible since it
would mean subordinating the real suffering of others to our own.

CHAPTER 5

THE ALLURE OF VIOLENT MOVING IMAGES

Introduction

Realist strong violent moving images, such as those in *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* and *Irreversible*, contain victims, agents, and witnesses of representations of violence. The catharsis hypothesis analyzed in Chapter 3 is less powerful and affective than the strong empathy and edification discussed in Chapter 4; however, the strength and depth of the simulation in response to realist strong violent moving images begs an interesting question. Why would people be attracted to, derive pleasure from, the extreme and often unpleasant psychological and physiological experience of simulating the consciousnesses of victims, agents, and witnesses to violence? If we posit edification, as Chapter 4 and the edification hypothesis do, have we arrived at a satisfactorily complete answer or have we fallen prey to the philosophical trend in analyses of violence that transforms violence into something other than pain, suffering, and hurt, for example, catharsis or edification. If we correct for this mistake, we are left with an apparent difficulty or paradox, a paradox similar to the paradox of horror discussed by Noël Carroll or Aaron Smuts in "The Paradox of Painful Art." That is, what is the allure and pleasure derived from viewing realist strong violent moving images which typically result in unpleasant feelings? One place to begin to bring a discussion of violence back to the core aspects of violence itself, is to examine the phenomenon of violence, pain, and suffering in modern contexts.

There is, currently, a socially prevalent phenomenon of self-torture and internalized cruelty. Although better recognized under the psychological diagnosis of deliberate self-harm syndrome, it is tantamount to self-torture in the fullest sense of the word. In its predominant manifestation, deliberate self-harm, also called self-mutilative, self-destructive, or self-injurious behavior, is an attempt to provide rapid relief from intense feelings of extreme emotional distress; the substitution of one type of pain or suffering for another. To call the phenomenon deliberate self-harm, though, is to couch the issue in sterilized dullness and euphemisms. A better definition of deliberate self-harm is the voluntary infliction of pain or injury on oneself absent conscious intent to commit suicide typically accompanied by the deliberate destruction of one's own body tissue.[1] It ranges in severity from extreme often rare acts such as eye enucleation, castration, and limb amputation, to moderately severe instances of head banging, throat or eye gouging, self-biting, and joint dislocation, to the least severe and most prevalent manifestations such as hair pulling, nail biting, skin picking, skin scratching, skin burning, skin cutting, and skin carving. These less extreme forms of self-harm have an occurrence rate of at least 1,000 per 100,000 population per year.[2] A study of undergraduate students revealed that 12% had deliberately cut, burned, or carved themselves at least once.[3] Deliberate self-mutilative behavior has been represented in a

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[1] Armando Favazza, "The Coming of Age of Self-Mutilation," *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 186(5) (May 1998): 259-268.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

wide range of ages, 6-75,[4] with studies revealing a relatively equivalent occurrence rate

for men and women.[5] However, even these statistics may in fact be underestimates due

to the shame, embarrassment, and thus isolation and secrecy cultivated by self-injurers.

That this behavior, especially in its extreme forms, is synonymous with self-torture or

self-inflicted violence seems obvious. And that self-harm in its clinical and theoretical

forms is partially, if not fully, a result of the turmoil of someone's inner world and

indicative of a less visible internalized cruelty seems equally apparent.

<div align="center">Self-Torture and Internalized Cruelty</div>

How do we begin to understand the need for self-torture and internalized cruelty,

the human compulsion and impetus toward self-imposed suffering directed externally at

the corporeal body or internally at the soul or psyche?[6] Such a desire to self-harm seems

at best odd and misguided, at the worst dangerous and indicative of sickness. Socially we

seem compelled to denounce violence, torture, and cruelty as destructive of life in its

fullest sense, yet in subtler individualized and personal manifestations many of us

undertake some form of self-inflicted suffering.[7] The social phenomenon of self-torture

is indicative and resultant of an internal self-cruelty. To talk about one is to talk about

the other, and to talk about one without the other is to miss half the story. Deliberate self-

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[4] E. Mansell Pattison and Joel Kahan, "The Deliberate Self-Harm Syndrome," *American Journal of Psychiatry* Vol. 140 (1983): 868.

[5] Ibid.

[6] At this point it seems appropriate to term the object of internalized cruelty the soul or "psyche" even though Nietzsche might say that this behavior is precisely what constitutes the soul.

[7] Not trivially, the joy of running is incomprehensible to some people.

harm is an extension or expression of a deeply imbedded need for self-torture and internalized cruelty.

Although it is often traits such as moral maturity, intellectual development, and so forth that we outwardly praise, self-torture and internalized cruelty are appealing for a number of reasons. There is, of course, something enviable in those who are able to sacrifice of themselves, not just to and for others, but as paradigms of discipline and restraint. To see beyond immediacy and base sensual desire is praiseworthy. The ideal of the self-sacrificing, altruistic person is not perceived as ignoble or sick, but laudable. However, instead of casting self-sacrifice as selflessness, and beginning to recognize it as derivative of self-denial, or, more accurately, internalized cruelty and self-torture, the attractiveness of such a characteristic lessens. When we follow the progression of self-torture and internalized cruelty through to deliberate self-harm behavior and beyond, we must reevaluate the foundations of the practice of self-denial or asceticism. So, what is the appeal of self-torture and internalized cruelty that continues to persist in, and for many consume, everyday life?

To begin to answer such a question, it is beneficial to investigate the origin or creation of what has become understood as bad conscience, guilt, and altruism, which are themselves constituted by, and constitutive of, a deeply imbedded need for self-denial, self-suffering, self-torture and internalized cruelty. I say constituted by and constitutive of because, as Nietzsche rightly contends, bad conscience is the product of internalized cruelty,[8] but following this, bad conscience and guilt, recast as altruism and selflessness,

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[8] Brian Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality* (New York: Routledge Press, 2002), 225.

make a certain demand of the self to continue to engage in the practice of self-torture and internalized cruelty. Once we have created and recast bad conscience and guilt as the aesthetic ideal, we require a mechanism by which to punish and deny ourselves. And when internalized cruelty has reached its internal peak and can be kept inside no longer, it must turn outward, just as it was previously forced to turn inward. However, now that its expression must not manifest itself as the infliction of harm on others, it must be directed at our own body. In an attempt to investigate this interesting occurrence, I will undertake a brief discussion of the nature and appeal of the ascetic ideal, or, as understood more accurately, self-torture and internalized cruelty.

First, this chapter will address the origin of bad conscience and guilt as understood and explained by Friedrich Nietzsche in *The Genealogy of Morals*. Second, it is important to explicate how this self-imposed self-denial and self-suffering begins to be perceived as a beautiful ideal, namely, an ascetic ideal; that is, the torture of oneself becomes beautiful to oneself. It becomes understood as an expression of power and strength, the pain becomes sublime, and, in the case of self-injurers, the blood itself becomes beautiful. Third, this chapter will attempt to understand the appeal of such a self-suffering ideal in relation to the people who cling to it so dearly; and further how this ascetic ideal more fully understood as self-torture and internalized cruelty can be redeemed by so many as something praiseworthy and as life-affirming in contrast to Nietzsche's conception of asceticism which emphasizes the denial of natural instincts and by implication the fulfillment of life itself. Oddly, it seems that Nietzsche will condemn self-denial as repressive and hostile to life; however, during the third essay of the

Genealogy presents evidence that in effect valorizes the ascetic ideal as beneficial to the philosopher, the priest, and, in fact, most dramatically, as life-saving for the average person. Interestingly, life-affirming is often how self-injurers view their own acts of self-harm; therefore, it is important to recognize Nietzsche's own uncertainty and confusion when writing about the phenomenon of self-torture and internalized cruelty. Nietzsche struggles to understand the duality of the ascetic ideal just as we do, and just as self-injurers struggle to understand their own motivations for self-harm. What becomes apparent is the confusion and ambiguity Nietzsche himself feels toward the phenomenon. Fourth, where does the social phenomenon of deliberate self-harm fit into the notion of self-torture and internalized cruelty? Fifth, this chapter will examine what else can be said about bad conscience, guilt, and the ascetic ideal as being constitutive and creative of a soul or internal world, and what this says about the subject or soul we have as a result of such self-torture and internalized cruelty. Finally, is there a way to understand the allure of the ascetic ideal as aesthetic pleasure and thus make sense of the painful experience but powerful allure of realist strong violent moving images?

It appears that while Nietzsche correctly identifies a possible hypothesis for the origin and appeal of the ascetic ideal, its categorization as purely life-denying or ignoble is not a complete picture of asceticism in its alluring life-affirming and powerfully disciplined form; however, if the evaluative judgment that we are making is resultant of the soul or inner world which was in fact constituted by the very thing that is being judged, how sure can we really be about its value? Would not the soul struggle to retain the mechanism by which it was and is constituted? Since presumably we owe our soul or

the expansion of our inner world to bad conscience, guilt, self-torture, and internalized cruelty, and we certainly value our soul, how could we ever bring ourselves to fully condemn the mechanisms that created it?

The Origin of Bad Conscience and Guilt

Nietzsche offers a preliminary discussion of bad conscience early in the second essay of *The Genealogy of Morals*. An initial analysis of bad conscience traces guilt back to the consequences of the development of promise-making and the relationship between a creditor and a debtor. By means of the development of the creditor debtor relationship, we begin to see the use of the promise, which is associated with having a conscience or remembering to follow through with one's promise in the future. Therefore, by making a promise we now become responsible for our future behavior and begin to see a blurring between a conception of debt and a conception of guilt as we now become morally responsible for upholding our promise. Any breaking of that promise becomes associated with bad conscience as the opposite of promise-keeping. Additionally, the notion of repayment does not necessarily involve the recompense of what was borrowed solely with money or property, but instead with pleasure for the creditor. Nietzsche contends we have a natural penchant for inflicting suffering; "To behold suffering gives pleasure, but to cause another to suffer affords an even greater pleasure."[9] As such, our natural instinct for cruelty and pleasure in inflicting suffering comes to the fore as the creditor is allowed to collect their unpaid debt in pleasure, and what better way than through punishing the debtor who has failed to pay back their debt, failed to fulfill their promise.

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[9] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Francis Golffing (New York: Anchor Books, 1956), 198.

However, as we will see, this natural impetus is eventually repressed and internalized resulting in self-torture and internalized cruelty.

For Nietzsche, though, the above analysis is just a preliminary sketch since it is not until section sixteen of the second essay of the *Genealogy of Morals* that Nietzsche proffers a more substantial discussion or hypothesis concerning the origin of bad conscience. It is this same bad conscience that, when coupled with religion, creates the unbearable guilt and suffering leading to the creation, acceptance, and appeal of the ascetic ideal. Although Nietzsche implicates Christianity, priests, or the so called state as the repressing mechanism for stifling natural instincts, it seems best to understand these oppressors/repressors as indicative or symbolic of a type of person or institution.[10] In doing so, we remove some of the problems that come with discussing religion, and can talk more broadly about a human condition which, in fact, the ascetic ideal represents. Nevertheless, whoever it may be, their role is powerful, and Nietzsche explains the consequences of such an oppression and repression of natural desires that will be echoed for many years to come. Nietzsche offers an intelligible illustration of the result of such a repression of our natural instincts and thus the origin of bad conscience and guilt.

Although possibly distasteful, it is not too controversial to maintain that people naturally gain a certain pleasure and satisfaction in witnessing or inflicting cruelty. Of course the outward physical expression of such a desire or the revealing of the internal pleasure gained from viewing such acts are often restrained by the threat of social, legal, or religious punishment. In addition, there are innumerable desires that pertain to the

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[10] David Taffel, *Nietzsche Unbound*, (St. Paul: Paragon House, 2003), 81.

satisfaction of sensual or bodily desires that are further denied by various social, legal, or religious condemnations, but this is not to say that any of these restraints are effective at eliminating these natural instincts. On a certain view, this repression becomes the catalyst for the origin of bad conscience and guilt; that is, this instinctual energy must go somewhere and since it does not merely dissipate or fade away it redirects itself inward, but not without consequence.

It might be altogether easier to understand this explanation by simply talking about energy, or rather instinctual energy whether it is sexual desire, psychological angst, pleasure in cruelty, anger, or so forth. Like the stored potential energy resulting from the compression of a spring, so too do we store up energy when we compress, repress, or restrain instinctual energy. However, unlike the spring, our instinctual energy is different in kind both quantitatively and qualitatively. Life bombards us with those things we must not do, must not feel, must not think, and, as such, there is a constant repression of instinctual energy that continues to build beginning very early in life. To release the energy from the spring, we release it and allow it to jump back to its original shape. So, what are we to do if the repression of our instinctual energy is not given a similar outlet by the religion, law, or institution that compresses it; when we are disallowed from springing back to shape so to speak? Imagine a child playing with an old metal spring found in the yard; no doubt he or she will try to compress the spring as best he or she can.[11] If the spring is confronted with enough force it will eventually relinquish its

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[11] There is something interesting in that it seems natural curiosity that will lead a child to do something like this, and there may be something that can be said about whether this behavior itself is instinctual, the impetus to press down or restrict something just because we can, which

attempt to bounce back and instead will attempt to release its stored energy in whatever

direction presents it with the least resistance. The spring will reverse its direction, and

drive itself into the ground. Similarly, where else are we to release our repressed

instinctual energy other than in the contrary or unnatural direction we normally would,

that is, instead of springing back to our original, natural state free from the anxiety of

repressed desire. Instead, we find a counter intuitive, unnatural internal release, and this

has the additional consequence of the alteration and creation of something new within us.

Nietzsche recognizes our internalization of instinctual energy as "neither gradual

nor voluntary"[12] in which the external expression of cruelty and desire is rapidly denied

and exponentially built upon. As a result, we undertake an 'inward turn' which in turn

creates a profoundly new inner world which we can, hesitantly, term the soul; "all

instincts that are not allowed free play turn inward. This is what I call man's

interiorization; it alone provides the soil for the growth of what is later called man's

soul."[13] As time passes, this coping mechanism becomes the norm rather than the

exception, and we develop what Nietzsche aptly dubs a "declaration of war against the

old instincts that had hitherto been the foundation of…power…joy,

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initially seems like an attempt to express power. Thus another ambiguity in Nietzsche's position seems to arise since he will certainly allow for the free expression of the "will" or the naturally powerful, but reject the use of that power to repress natural instincts. What happens when these two motivators come into contention?

[12] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Francis Golffing (New York: Anchor Books, 1956), 219.

[13] Ibid. 217.

and…awesomeness."[14] That is, we look "for so long with an evil eye upon [our] natural inclinations that they have finally become inseparable from 'bad conscience.'"[15] Thus, we have a preliminary explanation for the creation or origin of bad conscience which, when coupled with religious condemnation and the ever-present judgment of God, creates our contemporary notion of guilt.

Additionally, though, we cannot forget the ever-present and natural pleasure taken in the suffering of others, which contributes to the appeal of the denial of the expression of certain natural instincts. Searching for some satisfaction gained from the infliction of suffering, and denied an external outlet, this satisfaction now finds expression as pleasure taken in our own self-suffering. However, once such cruelty is internalized, we have a similar compression or repression that will itself eventually need to be let loose, and this time it finds release in inflicting physical harm on the external, corporeal body.[16] When this pleasure or satisfaction is not allowed external satisfaction, there is only one way to turn and we find satisfaction in cruelty to ourselves; but it is not only that the cruelty is internalized, it is also condemned. Yet how can we look upon ourselves with the disgust and condemnation society demands? We must change our perception of this tendency or proclivity for torture and cruelty. Thus we are forced to reformulate our perception of asceticism as life-denying and repressive, and instead create an ideal out of it, something

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[14] Ibid. 218.

[15] Ibid. 229.

[16] Interestingly, this cycle of inflicting harm on oneself both internally and externally seems only to be able to continue so long before it is let loose on another.

to be looked upon with awe and reverence (i.e., asceticism, altruism, selflessness), and thus a way to look back upon ourselves in the same way.

<div align="center">The Appeal of the Ascetic Ideal or Self-Inflicted Violence</div>

It is true that bad conscience must not always manifest itself as guilt leading to self-inflicted violence. Nietzsche explains how the Greeks had bad conscience but avoided the guilt that is so prominent in other religions by positing a different system of deities.[17] Blame was partially shifted onto the Gods; instead of creating sin they created foolishness. In addition, they valorized the internal animal, its strength, power, and expression. However, even as a tortuous and painful consequence of guilt, the ascetic has become no less of an ideal, and even more interestingly a beautiful ideal to be praised. To understand this notion of asceticism more fully, it is perhaps important to more adequately define the ascetic, which Nietzsche leaves slightly underdeveloped.

In defining the ascetic ideal or the ascetic person, we must be careful not to merely confine the definition to self-sacrifice, self-denial, and self-restraint. For Nietzsche, the paradigms of priestly asceticism are poverty, chastity, and humility,[18] but this is far too restrictive. Taken to its logical conclusion, and out of its religious context, self-denial involves much more than restraining oneself from wealth, sex, and boastfulness; it is more properly couched as the denial of all possible desires that lead to excesses. In addition, though, it is not simply a life of moderation that is emphasized, but

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[17] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Francis Golffing (New York: Anchor Books, 1956) and Brian Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality* (New York: Routledge Press, 2002), 242-244.

[18] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Francis Golffing (New York: Anchor Books, 1956), 243.

an actual self-enforced denial that is painful, that can truly be counted as sacrifice. When that has been accomplished, we naturally move to the actual infliction of internal psychological and external physical pain and suffering; self-inflicted violence. In doing so, in facing, inflicting, and surviving such things, we satisfy the desire for punishment, cruelty, and violence, but also convince ourselves of attaining a certain discipline, toughness, and strength. Just as we view selfless altruism as beautiful for its self-sacrificial qualities, so to does our self-torture and internalized cruelty become beautiful, albeit misguided, as proof of our own self-restraint, strength, and devotion to purity.

As bad conscience and guilt motivate us toward ever more intense self-inflicted violence, there develops a confusion between the suffering we feel and the pride and strength resulting from the discipline and purity we have achieved. Bad conscience, guilt, altruism, suffering, pain, and self-denial all become intimately intermingled and inseparably intertwined with each other. Although the ascetic ideal becomes mistakenly understood as self-control, discipline, and altruism, it nevertheless remains painful, and in the face of this pain, this conception of a self constituted by interiorization, this new internal world of self-torture, what else are we left with but to find a way to make sense of it all. Next, we must create meaning to such suffering, to the ideal we have accepted as necessary. By discovering this meaning, we can understand the true appeal of the ascetic ideal. Nietzsche's explanation for the appeal of the ascetic ideal seems to point to the unbearable suffering and pain that is a natural consequence of life.

Besides the valorizing of discipline, strength, and purity in the face of sensual desires, there is also the all important use of the ascetic ideal to affirm life and give it

meaning. In the third essay of the *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche undertakes a

discussion of why the ascetic ideal appeals to various people. Nietzsche quickly

dismisses the ascetic ideal's usefulness to the artist. For the philosopher, however, the

ideal allows the full pursuit and attention to his or her discipline. By practicing the

ascetic ideal, the philosopher is freed from external influences and internal distractions.

As for the priest, the power derived from such an ideal is obvious as they themselves

become representatives of God with the power to condemn, redeem, and judge.

However, it is how this ideal has been disseminated and accepted by the masses that is

most important to understand. How did the self-torturous guilt and internal suffering of

self-denial become so necessary, widespread, and appealing?

The appeal of the ascetic ideal for people is simply its ability to make us feel

powerful in light of the meaningless suffering of life. Nietzsche writes, "life employs

asceticism in its desperate struggle against death; the ascetic ideal is a dodge for the

preservation of life."[19] In *Nietzsche on Morality*, Brian Leiter succinctly constructs what

he believes is Nietzsche's argument from the third essay of *The Genealogy of Morals*:

1. Suffering is a central fact of the human condition.
2. Meaningless suffering is unbearable and leads to "suicidal nihilism" (GM III: 28).
3. The ascetic ideal gives meaning to suffering, thereby seducing the majority of humans back to life, i.e., it maximizes their feeling of power within the constraints of their existential situation.[20]

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[19] Ibid. 256.

[20] Brian Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality* (New York: Routledge Press, 2002), 256.

If this is in fact the case, that is, we covet the ascetic ideal as life-affirming, powerful, and a denial of the meaningless of life and its attached suffering, then we have an ideal that represents power, strength, discipline, and a will to life. As the *Genealogy of Morals* unfolds, Nietzsche himself gives the impression of being unsure and confused as a result of grappling with the seemingly dual nature of the ascetic ideal. It is here that we begin to see a tension develop between Nietzsche's conception of asceticism and self-denial in the earlier essays and the life-affirming conception of asceticism, which seems to be presented in the third essay.

The ascetic ideal not only rescues the individual, but becomes the savior of society. Just as in the *Republic* the individual is understood as the smaller correlate of the state, the individual, in saving oneself from destruction, further saves society[21] by sparing it from the expression of its natural instinct to external cruelty and thus the breakdown of social relations. Couple all of this with a need and desire to be punished, and we have an ideal that is hugely appealing; that is, we are at once saving ourselves, saving society, and prostrating ourselves before God. Ultimately, self-inflicted violence as self-harm, self-torture, and internalized cruelty struggles for life against meaningless suffering with the mechanism of deliberately willed suffering. The ascetic ideal has now become life-affirming and powerful for a host of reasons, and revealing of the full appeal of the ascetic ideal. Finally, this notion of asceticism ad self-torture as life-affirming can be seen in the reasoning of self-injurers.

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[21] Giles Fraser, *Redeeming Nietzsche: On the Piety of Unbelief* (New York: Routledge Press, 2002), 85.

Contrary to common opinion, self-harm is not always mere replacement of pain with another more intense one. Many self-injurers report not even feeling the sensation of cutting or burning; the experience is more aptly described as the cessation of pain. Further, although self-harm is often seen as the penultimate to suicide, self-harm is more often anti-suicidal in its attempt to eliminate powerful feelings of hopelessness or numbness to life. Far from trying to kill themselves, self-injurers are attempting merely to feel alive again. Thus, deliberate willed suffering in its contemporary manifestation maintains the same ambiguity found in Nietzsche's account by being understood socially as life-denying and individually as life-affirming.

The Ascetic Ideal in Realist Strong Violent Moving Images

There is, of course, a difference between external suffering and internal suffering; a cut, a punch, or a stab are all different in kind from psychological pain. Corporeal, sensuous suffering is difficult to describe, but we have a somewhat specific lexicon for conveying the awfulness of physical pain. We are, however, more descriptively inept when it comes to capturing internal suffering. Even a middle ground of external and internal self-torture such as self-enforced starvation which involves external, sensuous corporeal pain and internal, intangible pain cannot capture the true misery of hating oneself, of feeling inadequate, guilty, and powerless. So, when forced to make sense of these feelings of misery, meaningless, and suffering we need recourse to another kind of explanation. One way to make ourselves feel in control and strong is to inflict harm upon ourselves, and this is where the notion of bad conscience and guilt begins to transform

into a beauty, the beauty of self-sacrifice and the beauty of the ascetic ideal. [22] However,

is it right to call this ideal powerful and life-affirming?

As demonstrated above, self-imposed suffering is absolutely life-affirming for

those diagnosed with deliberate self-harm syndrome, but it is also life-affirming by

creating an inner world required for living life in its fullest sense; an inner world for the

free expression of the self, for contemplation, and for security from the external world. It

is life-affirming because the ascetic ideal creates this inner world that is unequaled in

complexity and uniqueness.

> [T]o direct violent cruelty against oneself rather than
> others, to burn into a greater part of one's nature a 'no' to
> its outward expression, to become contemptuous of
> instincts of which one was 'formerly' proudest, to live with
> the contradiction of a freedom that is both restricted
> (externally) and enhanced (internally), creates a wholly
> new phenomenology: that of human nature as
> problematical and contradictory, that of oneself as a riddle
> to oneself, that of the tortured 'inner life' perpetually
> examining itself, that of a compromised 'outer' freedom

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[22] Before moving on, it is important to draw attention to the similarities between the ascetic ideal, self-inflicted suffering, and sublimation in psychoanalytic theory and as described by Sigmund Freud. Again, for brevity's sake, a complete analysis is not possible, but a few words will clarify the distinctions. Sublimation is often understood as a defense mechanism that replaces a dangerous, harmful, or otherwise unwanted emotion or desire for a more socially acceptable or productive project. This understanding of sublimation resembles the transformation of desires for violence and self-inflicted violence to the desire to view realist strong violent moving images. However, the primary difference between sublimation in psychology and the account of self-inflicted harm from viewing realist strong violent moving images as detailed in the current chapter lies in the relative awareness individuals have for the purpose of their endeavors. Sublimation, especially as described by Harry Stack Sullivan in *The Interpersonal Theory of Psychology* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1954), is often described as a "covert satisfaction" about which the individual is wholly unaware. I contend that while the reason for enjoying realist strong violent moving images might not be revealed by the viewer to others, he or she is much more cognizant of the desire for self-inflicted violence than he or she is when unknowingly engaged in sublimation as understood in psychology. Therefore, while worthy of further comparison and discussion, sublimation is not identical to the process of developing an ascetic ideal satisfied by engaging with realist strong violent moving images as detailed above.

> versus a purer 'inner' freedom…[the] creation of an inner, freer world, later christened 'the soul'.[23]

The emotive mirroring and shared consciousness afforded and undertaken while viewing the violence of realist strong violent moving images such as those in *Irreversible* enables viewers to direct violence at themselves and deny its outward expression. What occurs is an internalized violence that is only possible through the unfolding of an unfathomable and ineffable experience of becoming the witness, agent, and victim of terrible violence. The phenomenological experience of viewing realist strong violent moving images is ultimately constitutive of our soul, an expansion of an internal world in proportion to the shrinking of our external world; "man's interior world, originally meager and tenuous, was expanded in every dimension, in proportion as the outward discharge of his feelings was curtailed."[24] Such an internal expansion is a result of the profound process of catharsis, edification, and strong empathy outlined in Chapters 3 and 4. An allure of realist strong violent moving images is also the allure of ascetic pleasure from self-inflicted violence.[25] Self-inflicted violence from emotive mirroring and shared consciousness with the victim, agent, and witness of violence in realist strong violent moving images.

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[23] Simon May, *Nietzsche's Ethics and his War on 'Morality'*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 63.

[24] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Francis Golffing (New York: Anchor Books, 1956), 217-218.

[25] I am hesitant to call what occurs ascetic pleasure since the experience seems pleasurable only by curtailing a worse experience; however, I think it is appropriate and sufficiently accurate in this context. For more discussion of the controversy surrounding the necessity of viewer experience being pleasurable or hedonic, see Aaron Ridley, "On a Paradox of the Heart," *Philosophical Studies* 65 (1992): 53-65.

Coda

Chapter 1 defined strong violent moving images. Chapter 2 located and further refined realist strong violent moving images. Chapter 3 resolved the vague notion of catharsis in relation to realist strong violent moving images and further revealed the inadequacy of its explanation for the allure of viewing violence. Chapter 4 utilized the edification hinted at in Chapter 3 and demonstrated how a more profound level of engagement with realist strong violent moving images occurs as a result of emotive mirroring and shared consciousness with the victim, agent, and witness of violence represented in realist strong violent moving images. Finally, Chapter 5 outlined the origin and appeal of an ascetic ideal and its manifestation in response to realist strong violent moving images. However, an ascetic pleasure is not identical to an aesthetic pleasure. Is it likely that such a complex and profound experience frequently occurs, or even catalyzes the desire, to view realist strong violent moving images? Is there a simpler explanation to be found somewhere in the discussion so far? Could we not just say people enjoy viewing violence because it arouses aesthetic pleasure?

It has been demonstrated above that realist strong violent moving images represent destruction: destruction of bodies, destruction of identity, destruction of the transcendental self, and as Scarry says, destruction of the world. It may be, that we do not need to experience this destruction to appreciate its representation. I know Henry's victims are utterly destroyed, I know Alex is utterly destroyed, and I know violence utterly destroys. Again, violence, pain, and suffering are ineffable and inexplicable, but so to is the aesthetic pleasure of viewing violence. Another key to understanding the

allure of realist strong violent moving images may lie in understanding the pleasure of destruction for destruction's sake.

In "Destruction and Complexity: An Application of Aesthetic Theory," David B. Greenberg and Vernon L. Allen tested the hypothesis that the more complex and complete the destruction of something, the more aesthetic arousal derived on the part of the viewer of that destruction. Realist strong violent moving images, as opposed to other violent moving images, are unique in their ability to arouse profound catharsis and edification through emotive mirroring and shared consciousness while distancing the viewer enough to further allow profound self-reflective contemplation. While realist strong violent moving images appeal to the beauty and pleasure of the ascetic ideal, the experience of the ascetic ideal is merely another step in heightening the recognition of the ubiquitious presence of violence and its utter destruction of worlds. Although the body is often perceived as a unified whole, violence reveals the bodies immeasurable complexity and fragility; likewise with our identities and conceptions of self. Our infinitely complex world is completely destroyed by violence. And, it is the representation of this destruction that arouses aesthetic pleasure and ultimately an ineffable awe. The allure of violent realist strong violent moving images is the literal and figurative destruction displayed on screen. An aesthetics of violent moving images is not complete without understanding the appeal of the destruction of our internal and external world, nor is an understanding of the allure of actual violence.

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