Disciplining the Spectator:

Subjectivity, the Body and Contemporary Spectatorship

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I, Theresa Anne Cronin, declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

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Abstract

In this thesis the author argues that although questions of the spectator's corporeal engagement with film are much neglected by film theory, the body is nevertheless a central term within contemporary cinema, in its mode of address, as a locus of anxiety in media effects debate, and as site of disciplinary practices. And while the thesis begins by demonstrating both the socially and historically constructed nature of spectatorship, and the specific practices that work to create contemporary cinema's corporeal address, the latter half of the dissertation devotes itself to revealing the regulatory implications of this physical address. That is, the author shows that cinema's perceived capacity of affect the body of the spectator is a profound source of cultural anxiety. But more importantly, through an analysis of the films *Funny Games, Irréversible*, *Wolf Creek,* and the genre of 'torture porn' more generally, what is revealed in these final chapters is that the regulation of cinema in the contemporary era is less a question of the institutionalised censorship of texts, and more a question of regulating the 'self'. In this respect, the author demonstrates the specific disciplinary practices that attempt to present the problem of violent, and sexually violent, imagery not as a textual issue per se, but a question of the formation of appropriate spectatorial relations. Moreover, this study begins the process of teasing out the ways in which the contemporary spectator is induced to see the problem of media violence as one that can be resolved through what Foucault would term, *techniques of the self.*

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Introduction

Sitting in the darkened auditorium of the cinema, time and time again I marvel at its ability to move me. I am struck by the adrenaline that flows through my veins during an action sequence, by the anxiety that I feel when the hero is in danger, by my disgust at the sight of blood and guts flying, by a film's ability to make me lose control and break down in tears in public, and by the myriad other shocks and sensations delivered routinely by the cinema. And I am not alone. Looking around at the members of the audience during these films I see agitated people, people holding on more tightly to their friends and partners, people averting their gaze and searching through their pockets for handkerchiefs. I hear them jump and gasp at the unexpected, signal their revulsion and sniffle quietly into their handkerchiefs.

These are not extraordinary events for the cinemagoer, they are part and parcel of the film experience, which leaves me baffled at why there should be such a gap between this everyday *experience* of watching a film and the *theory* that film scholars use to describe, interpret and deconstruct the moving image. Film theorists may enrich a text enormously through their ability to unmask the hidden structures, to expose the ideological foundations and unveil the unconscious desires that make up a mainstream Hollywood film. But after all is

said and done, I find that very little has been said about the way in which audiences *respond* to films physically.

Contemporary film theory, until very recently, has focussed predominantly on the structural and psychological aspects of film viewing. Theorists have generally glossed over both the sensual or corporeal address of particular films and severely neglected the undeniable physicality of film viewers. Despite an overwhelming emphasis on spectatorship and film 'reception' within film theory, the body of the spectator has been virtually ignored. Rather, spectatorship has been constituted almost exclusively as a psychical process. If the body has been considered at all, it is only insofar as it contributes to the functioning of the psychical apparatus.

The initial purpose of my study then, was to account for the physicality of cinema. To attempt to reinsert the body into film theory, in a way that took account of the specific ways in which the spectator's body has been constructed by cinema. Doing so meant moving analysis beyond the narrow confines of the spectator's encounter with the text, and thinking about the wider discourses of cinema and their effect on the cinematic experience. My contention was that the spectator's encounter with the cinema should be considered as a series of small but significant "coercions that act upon the body…its gestures, its behaviour". Indeed that discourses of cinema as a whole represented "a 'mechanics of power'…[which] defined how one may have a hold over others' bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes".[1] Or to put it another way, I sought to show that spectatorship should be considered less as a metapsychological encounter with the filmic apparatus, and more as the product of specific disciplinary practices that occur within the wider discourses of cinema.

In this respect my first task was dedicated to uncovering the historical roots of contemporary spectatorship, in an attempt demonstrate that the spectator's relations to the screen were by no means a natural or inevitable product of cinema technology. Rather, as Miriam Hansen suggests,[2] historical audiences were induced to take up particular relations to the screen through the concrete regulation of bodies and spaces. But while recognition of these disciplinary practices pervades historical scholarship on cinema, this kind of Foucaultian analysis is not necessarily widely applied to contemporary film. This

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[1] Michel Foucault, 'Docile Bodies', in *The Foucault Reader: An Introduction to Foucault's Thought,* ed. Paul Rabinow, (London: Penguin, 1984), 182
[2] Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film*, (London: Harvard University Press, 1991)

brief archaeological foray therefore quickly gave way to a consideration of the peculiarly sensational event that is the contemporary cinematic encounter.

However, as my study progressed it became increasingly clear that discussions about the physical, corporeal address of cinema assumed a Manichean character. On the one hand it was clear that the sensational qualities of cinema were keenly pursued by spectators, and consistently promised by producers, and yet cinema's capacity to move the viewer in such a way formed the backbone of cultural fears about cinema's potential effects. That is, within contemporary discourse about regulation and censorship, the body began to emerge as a central term around which cultural anxiety resonated. Cinema's contemporary corporeal address therefore appeared to be strictly delimited in terms of what were considered to be legitimate, and what were considered to be illegitimate, perhaps even dangerous, uses. As my project developed therefore it began increasingly to take on the quality of chiaroscuro. Looking on the one hand at the way in which the corporeal address was produced and discussed within mainstream cinema, and on the other the way in which cinema's capacity to physically affect its audience was problematised.

So while the last two chapters of my thesis explore the very real cultural anxieties that surround cinema's assumed capacity to affect the spectator physically, the chapter on 'The Promises of Monsters' explores the way in which mainstream cinema attempts to both promote and provoke corporeal spectatorship, particularly within action-driven, high concept blockbusters, but also within horror cinema. Indeed, drawing on Annette Kuhn's analysis of "Big budget science-fiction extravaganzas", I contend that very often the primary attraction of high-concept films is that they "offer [a] total visual, auditory and kinetic experience" in which "the spectator is invited to succumb to complete sensory and bodily engulfment."[3] Moreover, as Kuhn suggests the consumption of this kind of spectacle "rests on a particular gaze, a form of looking which draws in senses other than vision",[4] and demands a form of analysis that "attends to the sensuous immediacy of the viewing experience."[5] In this instance, traditional accounts of spectatorship that rest on metapsychological models of spectator-text relations are wholly inadequate for the analysis of forms

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[3] Annette Kuhn, 'Introduction', *Alien Zone II: The Spaces of Science Fiction Cinema,* (London: Verso 1999), p.5
[4] Kuhn (1999), p.5
[5] Kuhn (1999), p.5

of cinema which are driven by the desire to deliver 'thrilling' and/or frightening experiences to its audience.

As a result, I will contend that the production of the contemporary corporeal address is not limited to the spectator's encounter with the film text but rather, the physical experience of the film encounter is produced and inflected by the wider discourses of cinema. And indeed, this chapter will endeavour to highlight the way in which the cinema industry itself makes use of a corporeal address in order to market its films. I will seek to show that contemporary cinema marketing aims, first and foremost, to situate cinema within the 'experience economy'.[6] That is, cinema promises precisely to deliver 'an experience' to its audience, and that within mainstream cinema, marketing revolves around the film's promise to deliver a specifically corporeal experience to the spectator. What I will seek to tease out in this analysis, is the way in which these commercial promises might influence the quality of the film encounter, and work to actively produce or, at the very least, intensify the spectator's corporeal engagement with the film.

That is, the purpose of these marketing texts is clearly to stimulate demand. But while these adverts, trailers and previews are designed to inspire the audience to go and see the movie, they also manage audience expectations. These materials prepare the viewer for the filmic experience, by attempting to engage the spectator before s/he has even entered the cinema by provoking excitement, anticipation or even trepidation before the cinematic event. But they also inform the potential viewer about the level of engagement, as well as the kind of responses that are expected from the audience. While these materials may help manage expectations, they also begin to manage or shape cinematic subjectivity. However the audience is by no means to be considered to be passively subjected to interpellation either by the film text itself, or by its concomitant marketing. Rather I will seek to show the ways in which this promise to deliver a visceral experience to the film viewer, promoted through both formal marketing and press reviews and reports, is taken up and circulated among audience groups themselves. And in this way I will seek to demonstrate that audience members become active agents in the formation of their cinematic subjectivity.

By contrast, the last two chapters of this thesis attempt to show the darker side of cinema's corporeal address. In this respect, the first chapter,

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[6] See B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore, *The Experience Economy: Work is Theatre and Every Business a Stage*, (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1999)

'Fear of The Dark: Media Effects and the Subjectification of Film Regulation',
follows a similar pattern to the preceding chapter. That is, in this chapter I
attempt to trace models of spectatorship as they have been constructed within
the law, as well as within media effects debates more generally. As I have
already suggested, I will seek to show that within these discourses, the body
becomes a locus for concern. Indeed, cinema's perceived capacity to affect the
spectator physically becomes a nexus of cultural fears. But more particularly,
what becomes evident within an analysis of media effects studies, as well as in
popular debate about the 'effects' of violence on the spectator, is that these
debates are thoroughly gendered.

Once again, I will seek to analyse the way in which ideas and concepts
produced within the regulatory discourse of media effects are taken up within
popular discussion of film. In this instance, in an effort to keep my discussion
focused on the particular way in which the discourse of media effects is
mobilised by the audience, I have chosen to examine discussions that surround
the film *Wolf Creek*,[7] although, as we will see, discussions about the film take
place within the larger context to concern over the genre of 'torture porn'.
Nevertheless, what this analysis of discussions and debates by both film
reviewers and the public more generally seeks to show is that sections of the
audience are not only thoroughly engaged in the formation of their own
cinematic subjectivity, but are also actively involved in the process of defining
and delimiting appropriate responses and relations to 'problematic' films.
While much previous work within audience studies has been conducted on fans'
relations with horror and violent film texts,[8] this chapter seeks to engage with
more 'mainstream' or 'non-fan' discussions of these problematic films. In doing
so this thesis sheds light on the more general social context within which the
consumption of film violence takes place, and attempts to demonstrate that key
sections of the mainstream audience are central to the disciplinary practices of
contemporary cinema, insofar as they not only attempt to police the behaviour of
other members of the audience, but they also endeavour to normatively regulate
spectator-text relations. Though perhaps more importantly, these audience
members can be seen not only to monitor the responses and behaviours of their
fellow audience members, but to actively interrogate their own responses to

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[7] *Wolf Creek*, directed by Greg McLean, (Australia: True Crime Channel, 2005)
[8] For example see Brigid Cherry, 'Refusing to Refuse to Look: Female Viewers of the Horror Film',
in *Identifying Hollywood's Audiences: Cultural Identity and the Movies,* ed. Melvyn Stokes and
Richard Maltby, (London: British Film Institute, 1999), Matt Hills, *The Pleasures of Horror,*
(London: Continuum, 2005) and Annette Hill, *Shocking Entertainment: Viewer Response to Violent
Movies,* (Luton: Luton University Press, 1997)

controversial film, in an effort to bring them into line with their own understanding of how one *ought* to respond to such imagery.

The final chapter of this thesis focuses on two films, Michael Haneke's *Funny Games*[9] and Gaspar Noé's *Irréversible,*[10] each notorious in its own way for its handling of the issue of on-screen violence. Although both of these films approach screen violence in very different ways, both of these films can nevertheless be considered to be a self-reflexive representation of the media violence debate, and as such they can help us to demonstrate how the discourse of media effects is taken up within the practice of filmmaking. These films have been chosen for inclusion in this thesis not only to highlight the different ways in which filmmakers might choose to construct the spectator of screen violence, but also to explore the ways they might attempt to discipline the spectator and reinforce what each of these filmmakers deem to be appropriate relations with images of violence on screen. But here too the body becomes a central term. So while on the one hand, Haneke can be seen to reject screen violence as a legitimate mode of expression, Noé on the other, suggests that the formation of appropriate spectatorial relations with the screen is to be found in both the intensity, and aversive nature of the experience.

In sum, what this project will attempt to do is to examine the relationship between subjectivity, the body and contemporary cinema. I will argue that the body is not only central to the mode of address within contemporary fiction film, but that the discourses of cinema actively discipline the spectator in a number of concrete ways in order to both produce and delimit this corporeal address. I will argue that the wider public discourse of cinema works to create a particular form of cinematic subjectivity that is both complex and contradictory. For while on the one hand the cinema industry, through its marketing and publicity, seeks to create and promote cinema as a site of intense physical thrills and pleasure, the physical nature of cinematic response also creates cultural anxieties that are used to justify the need to curtail engagement with certain cinematic forms.

What is interesting however, and the key finding from this study, is that despite the intensity of the fear that surrounds the spectator's, or more accurately the male spectator's relations with violent imagery, in the contemporary era it is relatively rare that this will lead mainstream viewers to call for institutional censorship in the course of their reviews and discussions. Instead, the circulation of media violence is increasingly treated as a problem of

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[9] *Funny Games*, directed by Michael Haneke, (Austria: Concorde-Castle Rock/Turner, 1997)
[10] *Irréversible,* directed by Gaspar Noé, (France: Mars Distribution, 2002)

the 'self'; a matter of simply eschewing engagement with these cultural forms (regulating through the market), or by working on the 'self' in order to more thoroughly align one's responses and reactions with culturally condoned and validated forms of engagement. Of course, there are resistant voices, but nevertheless, what the latter part of this study makes clear, is that in contemporary cinema the regulation of film is less and less treated as a matter of institutionalised censorship, and increasingly a matter of disciplining the spectatorial subject.

The Body in the Machine:

From Meta-Psychology to Technologies of the Self

Any serious attempt to engage with the question of subjectivity, spectatorship and the body within contemporary cinema must necessarily begin with a return to the 'golden age' of classical film theory in the early 1970's, and consider theories of the cinematic apparatus and its concomitant ideologies. Drawing predominantly on the disciplines of semiotics and psychoanalysis, writers such as Jean-Louis Baudry, and Christian Metz sought to expose both 'the cultural determinations of the cinematic machinery' and the influence of film technologies and techniques over the cinematic encounter, as well as the way in which representational forms might influence the viewer's perception and experience of the world. Although the work of these early film theorists is highly diverse, what connects them is precisely their concern with the processes of subjectivity. As a result, these different approaches have led to number of "interrelated and powerful (though often controversial) formulations which variously define the human subject as an epistemological category, a social category, and/or a psychoanalytic category".[11]

However, while these wide ranging studies of the cinema have paid close attention to the ways in which subjectivity is constituted within cinema, and

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[11] Philip Rosen, 'Preface', in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader,* ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), ix

have worked hard to account for the particular ways in which the spectator is positioned by the text, as I will show in this chapter, what is clearly neglected in these formulations is a consideration of the of the spectator as an embodied, corporeal subject. If the issue of the body arises at all within these theories, it is most often as a locus of and for desire and fantasy; a necessary precondition for the workings of the imaginary; or as an image constituted through ideology. The physical body of the viewer is almost wholly absent from these considerations of subjectivity, and where it is mentioned, it is reduced to little more than an object immobilised in the cinematic space and pacified by the text.

As feminist film theorists have successfully argued, this formulation of a 'disembodied' and universal spectator turned out to be constituted as resolutely 'masculine', in terms of its narrative positioning by the text, its consumption of 'woman as spectacle' on the screen, and in psychoanalytic accounts of spectatorial desire.[12] More importantly for discussion here, these early theories of the spectator also depend on a Cartesian model of subjectivity, in which subjectivity is constituted through mental processes. As a result they, like the Enlightenment philosophers before them, "have tended to ignore the body or to place it in the position of being somehow subordinate to and dependent for all that is interesting about it on animating intentions".[13] The problem, from a feminist standpoint, is that this sex-neutral, universal subject denies the very real impact our physical bodies play in structuring our experience and in the formation of our subjectivities. And moreover, in a world structured by the dualisms of mental and physical, mind and body, where the masculine comes to be associated with reason and transcendence, while the female comes to represent the nature and the materiality, the denial and denigration of the body in both philosophy and film theory, is tantamount to the exclusion of female subjectivity.

The radical reinsertion of the body into philosophical thought by writers like Rosi Braidotti and Elizabeth Grosz, therefore represents a sincere attempt to reconceive the traditional model of subjectivity in a way that purposefully displaces "the centrality of the mind, the psyche, interior, or consciousness (and even the unconscious) in conceptions of the subject".[14] Instead, it presents "a new form of materialism" that emphasizes "the embodied and therefore sexually

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[12] See for example, E. Ann Kaplan, *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera*, (London: Methuen, 1983) and Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', in *Visual and Other Pleasures*, 2nd ed, (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009)
[13] Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism,* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), vii
[14] Grosz, (1994), vii

differentiated structure of the speaking subject."[15] Such a project is clearly of enormous value to the feminist endeavour. However, it is not without opposition. As Nikolas Rose suggests, the danger of this focus on the body is that it may rely too heavily on the binary division of male and female and impose "a fallacious unification on a diversity of ways in which we are 'sexed'",[16] reinscribing the same universalising tendencies they are attempting to overcome.

Instead Rose argues we should see subjectivity "in a complex of apparatuses, practices, machinations, and assemblages within which human beings have been fabricated, and which presuppose and enjoin particular relations with ourselves." [17] Such a notion of subjectivity not only recognises the socio-historical specificity of contemporary personhood and allows for the multiple and contested ways in which subjects might be addressed by these discourses, but it also permits us to think through the ways in which these practices are pervaded by power relations, and in particular to investigate "the ways in which subjectivity has become an essential object, target, and resource for certain strategies, tactics, and procedures of regulation."[18]

That is not to say that gender does not matter. Indeed my research into the discourses surrounding controversial film showed that both the 'official' discourse of media effects and the everyday web discussions of viewers were pervaded by issues of gender. That is, 'gendered subjects' were categories produced by these discourses. Although in this respect, I find that this study raises far more questions than it answers. So while I work hard to show that discussions among viewers operate as subjectifying discourses, time and space did not necessarily permit a detailed study of the way in which men and women were positioned differently in these discussions.

Nevertheless Rose's distinctly Foucaultian formulation allows us to investigate the question of subjectivity in contemporary cinema in a highly productive manner. Rose's contention that "'the body' provides no sure basis for an analytic of subjectification"[19] may be correct, at least insofar as is it rejects essentialist and determinist accounts of the body within feminist theory. However, what I want to suggest in this thesis is that 'the body' is a central focus

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[15] Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 3
[16] Nikolas Rose, *Inventing Ourselves: Psychology, Power, and Personhood,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 10
[17] Rose, (1996), 10
[18] Rose, (1996), 152
[19] Rose, (1996), 10

for the discourses of cinema, and as such, it cannot be neglected. Indeed in terms of the constitution of the spectator of contemporary cinema what I want to demonstrate is that:

> All the effects of subjectivity, all the significant facets and
> complexities of subjects, can be as adequately explained using
> the subject's corporeality as a framework as it would be using
> consciousness or the unconscious. All the effects of depth
> and interiority can be explained in terms of the inscriptions and
> transformations of the subject's corporeal surface. Bodies
> have all the explanatory power of minds.[20]

This chapter will therefore ask how the body might be successfully reintegrated into the theory of cinematic subjectivity without falling prey to deterministic accounts of the 'body as destiny'.

The Apparatus and the Gaze

First published in 1970, Jean-Louis Baudry's account of the 'cinematic apparatus' presented a model of the cinema that went beyond the mere analysis of the text, to present a metapsychological account of the technologies of cinema and its effect on the spectator. Drawing on the works of Freud, Lacan and Althusser, Baudry argued that cinema was an "ideological machine"[21] that presented an illusion of an 'objective reality'. He argued that it operated as an optical apparatus which constituted the subject as "the active centre and origin of meaning"[22]. For Baudry, the cinema created a "transcendental subject", "no longer fettered by a body" but free to take up a position thoroughly aligned with the look of the camera. The subject therefore "becomes absorbed in, 'elevated' to a vaster function, proportional to the movement which it can perform", a space in which "the world will not only be constituted by this eye but for it".[23]

Spectatorial pleasure therefore derives from the sense of power and mastery provided by filmic techniques, which all the while mask the truth that like

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[20] Grosz, (1994), vii
[21] Jean-Louis Baudry, 'Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus', *Film Quarterly*, Vol.28, No.2, (Winter, 1974-1975), 44
[22] Baudry, (1974-1975), 40
[23] Baudry, (1974-1975), 43

the prisoner's in Plato's Cave who mistook mere shadows for images of the real world, those within the cinema "find themselves chained, captured or captivated"[24] by an ideology that presents itself as reality. Moreover, the physical space of the cinema, "projector, darkened hall, screen",[25] reproduces the conditions necessary for the functioning of Lacan's mirror stage, wherein the spectator might misrecognise the image on the screen as his own unified and idealised reflection. And indeed it is this misrecognition, this identification both with the camera and the image that completes the illusion that meaning originates from the spectator rather than being already constructed by the text. As Baudry puts it, cinema

> is an apparatus destined to obtain a precise ideological effect, necessary to the dominant ideology…Everything happens as if, the subject himself being unable - and for a reason - to account for his own situation, it was necessary to substitute secondary organs, grafted on to replace his own defective ones, instruments or ideological formations capable of filling his function as subject.[26]

For Baudry then, the very functioning of ideology within cinema requires the creation of a transcendental subject, a perceiving subject that precedes the bounds of their material and embodied existence. This spectator is a radically dematerialized subject, whose awareness of his own body is merely one of the "disturbing effects which result during a projection from breakdowns in the recreation of movement, when the spectator is brought abruptly back to discontinuity"[27]. If the spectator can be said to have a body at all, it is an immaterial, illusory, prosthetic body created through the misrecognition of the image as a reflection of the self.

Similarly, in a subsequent paper Baudry likens the experience of cinema to that of a dream: a fantasy of wish-fulfilment and desire. Drawing on Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*[28] Baudry argues that cinema, like the dream, induces the spectator to regress into a narcissistic state characterised as "a mode of relating to reality which could be defined as enveloping and in which the separation between one's own body and the exterior world is not well defined."[29] The dream, according to Freud, mimics the early experience of the suckling child where the mother is considered merely as an extension of the self. And

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[24] Baudry, (1974-1975), 44
[25] Baudry, (1974-1975), 45
[26] Baudry, (1974-1975), 46
[27] Baudry, (1974-1975), 42
[28] Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams,* (New York: Avon, 1965)
[29] Baudry, (1999), 773

cinema, Baudry suggests, as an experience analogous to the dream, promises a return to this state of satisfaction and fulfilment. That is, the spectator is *enveloped* by cinema, blurring his corporeal boundaries to the extent that he mistakes the representation before him as an object of perception. The erasure of the spectatorial body then, remains central to 'the impression of reality' that underpins cinema's ideological effects.

Here too Baudry suggests that the spectator is 'held captive' by the apparatus. Indeed, the effects of the cinematic text depend on the 'inhibited motoricity' enforced by the arrangement of the physical space of cinema. Just like the dreamer, the physical body of the spectator is immobilized. And just as in a dream, the spectator is unable "to act in any way upon the object of his perception."[30] The cinema may grant him a transcendental perspective, but he nevertheless lacks the agency to control or transform the content of the images presented to him. And despite the illusion of mastery and control afforded by the illusion of movement, the spectator remains entirely passive, both physically and perceptually; transfixed by the 'impression of reality'.

For Noél Carroll, the weakness of Baudry's theory is that, he relies too heavily on the physical arrangement of the cinema to account for the 'impression of reality' that cinema provides. As Carroll suggests, the heightened cinematic experience is not a direct result of the projection situation, or of the cinematic apparatus itself. Rather, the 'impression of reality' provided by some films is "not a function of simply throwing an image on the screen. It is the internal structure of these films that accounts for their effect, not the fact that they are projected. Not all films bestow comparative affective results."[31] The 'apparatus' is simply a means to an end rather than an end in itself. The 'arrangement' of the cinema auditorium is the vehicle through which the particular images of particular films might be allowed the opportunity to work their effects. But for Carroll it is the film texts, and the techniques they employ, that produce such 'intense affective responses'.

Moreover, as Annette Kuhn suggests, "in putting forward a monolithic model of the apparatus" Baudry effectively "closes off the possibility of making distinctions between different types of cinema."[32] The sense of 'mastery and control' produced by the apparatus, for example, describes a very particular

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[30] Jean-Louis Baudry, 'The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in Cinema', in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings (fifth edition),* ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 774
[31] Noel Carroll, 'Jean-Louis Baudry and 'The Apparatus', in Braudy and Cohen, (1999), 790
[32] Annette Kuhn, *Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema,* (London: Verso, 1994), 56

form of cinematic address. It cannot account for films like Gaspar Noé's *Irréversible* where the intention of the text, as we will see in the final chapter, is precisely to make the spectator feel 'out of control', disoriented, and alienated from the events onscreen. But even in its consideration of classical narrative films, it neglects the way in which particular genres like thrillers, horror films or melodramas make use of specific relations of knowledge in order to frustrate the viewer. Within these films a transcendental point of view, at least in the sense of having more knowledge than the characters onscreen, is often used to highlight the spectator's very lack of control; their inability to intervene in the course of the narrative, to stop the protagonist from meeting their end, from making a disastrous mistake, or failing to see the obvious. If the cinematic apparatus were always to impart the illusion of control, then texts that rely on these kinds of suspense and pathos would cease to function. Such an oversimplified account of the spectator's relation to the text therefore ignores the, often complex, relations of knowledge that a text develops in order to further the narrative and to manipulate the spectator's narrative desires.

Baudry of course, recognises that filmic techniques are central to the ideological functioning of cinema, but as Carroll's critique suggests, his emphasis on the effect of the physical arrangement of cinema is overplayed. One of the primary effects of the fully functioning cinematic apparatus is to persuade the viewer to 'forget' or abandon his physical body, and to become absorbed by the filmic body on the screen before him. As a result in both of his accounts of the cinematic apparatus the spectatorial body is theoretically expunged.

Baudry's account of spectatorship effectively rips the viewer from the social context in which viewing occurs, and supplants this social environment with a model of the psyche that is universalistic, essentialist and totalising in its effect. As writers such as Mary Ann Doane, Judith Mayne, Jackie Stacey and Jacqueline Bobo have demonstrated, relations to the screen are not as homogeneous as Baudry's writing would suggest, and the very real social differences of gender, race and sexuality can and do have an impact on identification with and the interpretation of film texts.[33] Baudry's account of a thoroughly individualised spectator also neglects the social circumstances in

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[33] See for example, Mary Ann Doane, 'Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator', in *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism*, ed. Patricia Erens, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); Judith Mayne, *Cinema and Spectatorship,* (London: Routledge, 1993); Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing*, (London: Routledge, 1994); Jacqueline Bobo, *Black Women as Cultural Readers,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995)

which film may be viewed. The development of VCR, DVD and Blu-ray notwithstanding, going to the cinema is often a social event in which awareness of both one's body, and communication with other people, is not necessarily a failure in the apparatus, but simply a different 'mode of relating' to that which is on the screen.

Like Baudry, Christian Metz also draws on psychoanalysis in order to formulate an explanation of cinema's extraordinary power. And like Baudry he draws on Lacan's account of the mirror stage, in which the first formation of the ego begins to take place as the child identifies with its own likeness. However as Metz points out, while the film screen may resemble a mirror, it differs from it in one essential respect: the spectator's own body is never reflected on the screen. As Metz puts it, "at the cinema, it is always the other who is on the screen; as for me, I am there to look at him...absent from the screen, but certainly present in the auditorium, a great eye and ear".[34] The spectator is physical in the sense that he is in possession of sensory organs, but like Baudry's conception, Metz's spectator is a not an embodied subject, he is a subject constituted through perception.

Metz's spectator may not be fully enveloped by the 'impression of reality' as Baudry's is. Metz's spectator "knows he is at the cinema",[35] he knows that he is "perceiving something imaginary", that his "sense organs are physically affected", that he is "not phantasising".[36] Moreover:

> The audience is not duped by the diegetic illusion, it 'knows'
> that the screen presents no more than a fiction. And yet, it is
> of vital importance for the correct unfolding of the spectacle
> that this make-believe be scrupulously respected[37]

Thus the spectator is aware of himself, his body and the constructed nature of the cinematic event, at least insofar as he is aware of the processes of perception. However, the spectator chooses to forget, to disavow, to wilfully suspend his disbelief in order to enjoy the pleasurable experience of the cinematic illusion. Metz's spectator is therefore not entirely passive. He must participate. Focussed on the experiences and images presented by the film, the spectator is 'disconnected' from the real world, "he must then connect to

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[34] Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and Cinema,* translated by The Society for Education in Film and Television, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 48
[35] Metz, (1982), 48
[36] Metz, (1982), 48
[37] Christian Metz, in Braudy and Cohen, (1999), 814

something else and accomplish a '*transference*' *of reality*, involving a whole affective, perceptual, and intellective *activity*'[38].

However, the spectator's awareness of the apparatus does not necessarily allow him the critical distance to achieve an awareness of the machinations of the ideological text. As Metz suggests:

> This perceived-imaginary material is deposited in me as if on a second screen…cinema… inscribes an empty emplacement for the spectator-subject, an all-powerful position…[And] as he identified with himself as look, the spectator can do no other than identify with the camera…his identification with the movement of the camera being that of a transcendental, not an empirical subject."[39]

Metz's spectator then, is a subject formed through the text, and as such is subject to the workings of the ideology contained therein.

Moreover, despite Metz's acknowledgment of the presence of the 'sense organs' within the physical space of cinema, his spectator is no more embodied than Baudry's. Metz's spectator is an 'all-perceiving'[40] subject who "*identifies with himself*, with himself as a pure act of perception"[41]. The 'impression of reality' at the cinema therefore depends on the fact that viewer enters a kind of *sub-motor, hyper-perceptive* state within the auditorium. Indeed, he suggests that, "the spectator's impressions, during a film's projection, are divided into two entirely separate 'series':…the 'visual series' (that is to say, the film, the diegesis) and the 'proprioceptive series' (one's sense of one's own body…as when one shifts around in one's seat for a more comfortable position)."[42]

While at first glance, this division of the cinematic experience into these two 'series' might seem to provide a theoretical space for the consideration of the physical, corporeal spectator, but Metz quickly recovers this potential by reiterating Baudry. For Metz, cinematic effects depend on the fact that these two 'series' of impressions are of different registers. That is, it is precisely "because the world does not intrude upon the fiction and constantly deny its claim to reality…that a film's diegesis can yield the peculiar and well-known impression of reality that we are trying to understand here."[43] The 'impression of reality' then, depends on the spectator 'forgetting' or 'ignoring' the viewing body in order to take up a position as an 'all-perceiving subject' within the text. In this

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[38] Christian Metz, 'On the Impression of Reality at the Cinema', in *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, translated by Michael Taylor, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 11-12
[39] Metz, (1982), 49-50
[40] Metz, (1982), 45
[41] Metz, (1982), 49
[42] Metz, (1974), 11
[43] Metz, (1974), 11

respect, the cinema screen therefore becomes "a veritable psychical substitute, a prosthesis for our primarily dislocated limbs"[44].

Metz's spectator therefore falls prey to the same universalism, essentialism and totalism that arise from a reliance on a singular and homogenous account of the spectatorial psyche. It ignores social and cultural difference among the audience, and elides an analysis of the social circumstances within which viewing takes place. Moreover, in both cases the spectator is seen to be a disembodied subject, free to take up a position as a transcendental being within the text, while his body remains passive and immobilised within the cinema auditorium.

Moreover, the characterisation of the body within Metz's account is that of a 'two-way conduit', on the one hand channelling information from the sensory organs from the outside, and on the other providing a vehicle of expression for the private, and incommunicable psyche. As Grosz sees it, the problem with this model of the body is that "its corporeality must be reduced to a predictable, knowable transparency; its constitutive role in forming thoughts, feelings, emotions, and psychic representations must be ignored"[45]. The body is a purely passive object through which the spectator's relations with the screen are channelled. And reading the text is an act of pure perception over which the body has little or no influence. As such the very real social and cultural differences that arise from the differences between bodies are easily ignored.

Furthermore, this account of the body borrows from a long history in which "philosophy as we know it has established itself as a form of knowing, a form of rationality, only through the disavowal of the body, specifically the male body, and the corresponding elevation of the mind as a disembodied term."[46] Within this tradition, the body comes to be defined in naturalistic, ahistorical and passive terms. And as Grosz points out, the opposition between mind and body comes to be correlated with a whole range of other dualisms, not least of which is "the opposition between male and female, where man and mind, woman and body, become representationally aligned".[47] Man therefore is capable of transcendence in a way in which women are not.

What this analysis suggests is a clear association between embodied spectatorship and femininity. However, as we will see in later chapters in an

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[44] Christian Metz, 'The Imaginary Signifier', translated by Ben Brewster, *Screen,* 16, (Summer 1975), 15
[45] Grosz, (1994), 9-10
[46] Grosz, (1994), 4
[47] Grosz, (1994), 4

investigation of subjectivity, the body and contemporary cinema, this turns out not to be the case. Indeed within the discourses of media effects, it is the masculine body that is a clear cause for concern. And while Grosz's theory remains valid insofar as these problematic viewers are identified and categorised through the language of deviancy, there is a certain tendency within this discourse to problematise masculinity as a whole.

Challenges to the metapsychological theories

Grosz's criticism of the philosophies of the body which underpin theories of the apparatus notwithstanding, direct challenges to the classical metapsychological approach have come from three main sources: feminist theory, critiques of visual culture and the work of audience/reception studies. Foremost amongst feminist critics was Laura Mulvey whose highly influential essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' came to dominate discussions of spectatorship in the years following its publication. In this paper, Mulvey employed the tools of Lacanian psychoanalysis to demonstrate the ways in which "film reflects, reveals and even plays on the straight, socially established interpretation of sexual difference which controls images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle."[48] Moreover, she argued that the classical cinematic apparatus created a particular form of spectatorship, rooted in patriarchal, masculine, Oedipal desires.

Mulvey's essay sought to challenge Metz and Baudry's universalistic account of spectatorship by demonstrating that the ideology of the cinema was far from gender neutral. In terms of both the construction of the image and looking relations, the classical narrative film addressed itself to a male spectator. That is, as Mulvey herself puts it Hollywood cinema from the Classical era, exemplified in the works of Joseph von Sternberg and Alfred Hitchcock, was dominated by an "eroticized cinematic look" that was "inscribed on the screen through its cinematic organization, point of view, privileged screen space, and so

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[48] Mulvey, (2009), 14

on, and that this way of looking is understood as gendered 'male'".[49] Mulvey's spectatorial subject sought pleasure in the cinema, and that pleasure was to be found in the fulfilment of 'masculine' scopophilic and narcissistic desires.

Like both Baudry and Metz, Mulvey draws on Lacan's theory of the mirror stage, suggesting that the cinematic apparatus, the darkened room, the silver screen, and the spectator's subordination to the narrative flow, were central to promoting both a voyeuristic and a narcissistic relation to the screen.[50] Mulvey argued that the spectator misrecognised the image on the screen as his own likeness, and adopted it as representation of an idealised self. And since in classical narrative film it was predominantly male protagonists who were active agents, controlling both the narrative events and 'the look' within the film, male viewers were offered a figure to identify with, a "reflected body of the self"[51] to enact their desires and fantasies. For Mulvey, the spectator's projection of his look onto this central protagonist fulfilled a primitive narcissistic desire for mastery and control. That is, "he projects his look onto that of his like, his screen surrogate, so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look…giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence."[52]

However, the pleasure gained from looking at the screen is not simply a question of narcissistic identification with the central protagonist. Central to Mulvey's argument is the recognition that in a cinema structured by the male gaze, women become objects of sexual stimulation. Within classical narrative films, she suggests, women are displayed for both characters onscreen, and the spectator within the theatre. Hence the appearance of the woman within the classical narrative film tends to interrupt the flow of narrative:

> Women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact…The presence of woman is an indispensable element of spectacle in normal narrative film, yet her visual presence tends to work against the development of a story-line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation.[53]

The woman's body then, becomes a pure spectacle, fragmented by close-ups, and styled for maximum eroticism.

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[49] Laura Mulvey, 'Unmasking the Gaze: Feminist Film Theory, History, and Film Studies', in *Reclaiming the Archive: Feminism and Film History,* ed. Vicky Callahan, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010), 20
[50] Mulvey, (2009), xxiii
[51] Mulvey, (2009), 18
[52] Mulvey, (2009), 21
[53] Mulvey, (2009), 19

Within this essay, pleasure in cinema revolves around the spectator's narcissistic and scopophilic look at the human body. The body therefore provides a locus for identification and an object of sexual desire. However, the spectator appears to be no more embodied than Metz or Baudry's. Mulvey's spectator is constituted as a physical being, whose body is important only insofar as it contributes to the structuring of gendered desire. So while Mulvey is principally concerned with providing an account of sexual difference within cinematic texts, her model of cinematic subjectivity implicitly incorporates an essentialist theory of gender, insofar as anatomy becomes the spectator's identificatory destiny. Moreover, Mulvey's universalistic account of the masculine psyche/masculine desire within her 'Visual Pleasure' essay elides the wider social, cultural and historical differences between spectators.

In many respects, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' was a product of its time. As a result, its polemical tone asserts a somewhat totalising vision of the Classical Hollywood film.[54] Indeed as Mulvey herself acknowledges, in her emphatic insistence on the masculinity of the spectator, she inadvertently "closed off avenues of inquiry that should have been followed up",[55] not least of which was the question of the female spectator. The implications of the essay on 'Visual Pleasure' were somewhat pessimistic. That is, in addressing the male viewer, Classical Hollywood films had very little to offer women other than images of their own objectification and subjection. While in 'Afterthoughs on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'', written some six years later, Mulvey attempts to flesh out the 'dilemma' faced by the female spectator, which, put simply, was to choose between adopting the male gaze, and its concomitant 'sadistic' pleasures, or to "find herself so out of key with the pleasure on offer, with its 'masculinisation', that the spell of fascination is broken."[56] The choice which faced women viewers in other words, was between a form a psychic transvesticism in which they became complicit with images of their own subjection, a rejection of the film, or an oscillation between the two.

Though as Mulvey herself points out, even Classical Hollywood cinema is not as monolithic as it first appears. Indeed she explicitly argues that "no ideology can ever pretend to totality: it searches for safety valves for its own inconsistencies".[57] One of those 'safety valves' was to be found in the 1950s melodramas of auteurs like Douglas Sirk, which in presenting a female

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[54] See Laura Mulvey, *Fetishism and Curiosity,* (London: British Film Institute, 1996), 9
[55] Mulvey, (2009), 31
[56] Mulvey, (2009), 31
[57] Mulvey, (2009), 41

protagonist's point of view, and in "witnessing the way sexual difference under patriarchy is fraught, explosive, and erupts dramatically into violence within…the family", these films can be seen to "act as a corrective"[58] to the male-centred genres of the Western and the gangster film. They worked to expose the cracks and fissures implicit in patriarchal culture, opening up spaces for women to experience a "dizzy satisfaction in witnessing…the pent-up emotion, bitterness and disillusionment well known to women".[59]

Despite the oppositional potential of 1950s melodrama, by Mulvey's own admission, these narratives often remained confined to issues of sex and the family, and as such they were not necessarily either socially progressive, or politically efficacious. In the late 1970s and early 1980s it appeared that the only viable alternative to this spectatorial ghettoization of women was to be found in the avant-garde, and independent film-making more generally. Seizing the means of filmic production offered the only viable route out of the "monolithic accumulation of traditional film conventions".[60] As she puts it, a "break with the past has to work through the means of meaning-making itself, subverting its norms and refusing its otherwise imperturbable totality."[61] However, this call for feminist experimentation with filmmaking practice, outside of the constraints of commercial cinema is, from another perspective, a tacit admission that even despite the moments of challenge and subversion to be found within Classical Hollywood cinema, Mulvey's spectatrix remains caught in a series of theoretical binaries: masculinity and femininity; activity and passivity; spectacle and gaze.

Mulvey's early focus on the aesthetic and psychoanalytic dimensions of the text has been thoroughly challenged in the intervening years by film historians, film sociologists and technological developments alike. On the one hand, scholars have argued that film studies as a whole has chosen to ignore the social-historical specificity of both the film industry, and the audience. While on the other, new technologies have opened up novel means of accessing and engaging with film texts. In her later work, Mulvey concedes these elisions. Indeed, as she herself puts it, it is not until one moves away from an analysis of cinema "within its own aesthetic and psychoanalytic integrity" and instead approaches Hollywood "as the specific cinema of the United States at a particular moment of its social and economic evolution" that "the simplicity and satisfaction of the original theoretical binary opposition of 'spectacle' and 'gaze'

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[58] Mulvey, (2009), 42
[59] Mulvey, (2009), 42
[60] Mulvey, (2009), 27
[61] Mulvey, (2009), 126

then begins to break down."[62] In this respect, Classical Hollywood's image of woman might be seen to bear witness, "not only to male desire, but also to a masking of political conflicts…within American society itself."[63]

Similarly, Mulvey acknowledges the important contribution made by feminist film historians in highlighting the centrality of the female viewer in the Hollywood of the 1920s, both in terms of Hollywood's attempts to present the aspirations and desires of the 1920s 'New Woman' within its narratives, but also in the industry's decision to present a plethora of female-oriented consumer goods on-screen, offering itself up as a shop window to young women with newly acquired spending power.[64] The work of Miriam Hansen suggests that in courting female audiences, Hollywood of the 1920s did not necessarily conform to the visual or narrative codes described in Mulvey's 1975 essay. Indeed, Mulvey sees Hansen's work as "an important corrective" to her early work. As she puts it:

> Valentino, as well as other matinée-idol-type stars of the 1920's, upsets my 1975 assumptions about the gendering of visual pleasure. Hansen points out that, as a primary object of spectacle for the female audience, Valentino's persona incurs a systematic 'feminization', but she ultimately revises the unequivocal binarism of Freud's passive and active opposition.[65]

While Hansen sees women as being subject to a host of social codes that make them more likely to indulge in a "sensuality of vision that contrasts with the goal-oriented discipline of the one-eyed masculine look",[66] her work nevertheless undoes any easy alignment of masculinity with the active, desiring and controlling gaze, and femininity with passive, objectified, to-be-looked-at-ness.

In addition, technological developments have also brought about a change in spectatorship. Cable, satellite, video and gaming technologies all clamour for the attention, the leisure time and the disposable income of the cinema-going public. The development and dissemination of these technologies has changed both the cinematic marketplace and our understanding of spectatorship. As Miriam Hansen points out,[67] under the weight of these techno-cultural developments the very category of *the* spectator developed by

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[62] Mulvey, (2010), 18
[63] Mulvey, (2010), 18
[64] Mulvey, (2010), 23
[65] Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), 169
[66] Hansen, (1991), 278-9
[67] Miriam Hansen, 'Early Cinema, Late Cinema: Transformations in the Public Sphere', in *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film,* ed. Linda Williams, (New Brunswick: New Jersey, 1997), 135

film theorists of the 1970s is in some doubt. It is not simply that the universalistic theory of the spectator has been displaced by a theoretical emphasis on the historically and culturally situated audience but also that the form of spectatorship described by these theories is becoming a thing of the past.

Hansen argues that the proliferation of domestic audio-visual equipment significantly challenges cinema by displacing it as the primary site of film consumption. But more importantly, these new technologies also bring about a fundamental change in the film/viewer relations. In the absence of the regulatory and disciplinary practices of the cinema, the textual strategies of the classical narrative film are no longer adequate to guarantee the spectator's absorption in the film. By providing numerous other distractions and chores the domestic viewing environment competes for the viewer's attention, while the technologies themselves work to increase the interaction between the film and the viewer. For example, television allows the viewer to comment, criticise or even abandon the film without social censure, and video allows the viewer to manipulate the viewing experience in an unprecedented fashion. For Vivian Sobchack, the development of these domestic technologies marks a profound shift within culture, from the cinematic to the electronic. As she sees it:

> The ability to control the autonomy and flow of the cinematic experience through 'fast-forwarding,' 'replaying,' and 'freezing' and the ability to possess the film's body and animate it at will at home are functions of the materiality and technological ontology of the electronic—a materiality that increasingly dominates, appropriates, and transforms the cinematic.[68]

There is little doubt that devices such as video, DVD and Blu-ray have fundamentally changed our relationship to the filmic text, but the transformation of which Sobchack speaks has informed not only our individual relationship with film but is exerting an increasing influence over the texts themselves. As Hansen puts it, while "the compulsive temporality of public projection has given way to ostensibly more self-regulated yet privatised, distracted and fragmented acts of consumption",[69] the spatioperceptual configuration of these 'new' technologies within the domestic environment has also shattered "the spell of the classical diegesis", and the 'illusionistic absorption' of the viewer that was

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[68] Vivian Sobchack, 'The Scene of the Screen: Envisioning Cinematic and Electronic "Presence"', in *Materialities of Communication*, ed. Hans Ulrich Gumbrechts and K. Ludwig Pfeiffer, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 96
[69] Hansen, (1997), 135

considered by Baudry to be the hallmark of classical narrative cinema has effectively broken down.

For Mulvey though, it is the interactive quality of these new technologies that mounts the greatest challenge to early formulations of gendered spectatorship. The capacity to intervene in the flow of narrative, to pause, skip, repeat or even access additional material, fundamentally undermines narrative cinema's linear structure and attacks the text's original cohesion. What it delivers in its place is what Mulvey calls an aesthetic of delay, replete with multiple and shifting modes of spectatorship. She argues that on the one hand, delayed cinema produces a pensive spectator who is concerned with the visibility of time, in particular, halting the relentless flow of narrative time in order to perceive and contemplate the moment of the pro-filmic event, while on the other hand it produces a possessive spectator who is able to access the film fetishistically, and consume individual images in ways that were hitherto unknown.

These new modes of viewing clearly challenge metapsychological theory's construction of a singular, universal spectator, held in thrall to the machinations of the cinematic apparatus. If the spectator is able to control the flow of narrative, Mulvey argues, "The process of identification, usually kept in place by the relation between plot and character, suspense and transcendence, loses its hold over the spectator."[70] Moreover, the male protagonist's role in leading the action and controlling narrative development, and the woman's role in providing indispensible moments of erotic spectacle, are also undone in the aesthetics of delay:

> With the weakening of narrative and its effects, the aesthetic of the film begins to become 'feminized', with the shift in spectatorial power relations dwelling on pose, stillness, lighting and the choreography of character and camera…The 'fetishistic spectator' becomes more fascinated by image than plot, returning compulsively to privileged moments, investing emotion and 'visual pleasure' in any slight gesture, a particular look or exchange taking place on the screen.[71]

Under these conditions, images of the male star are easily extracted from the narrative flow, making him an overt object of the spectator's fetishistic look. As such he becomes an object of erotic contemplation for the spectator, shifting the locus of mastery and control from the male protagonist to the 'feminized' spectator.

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[70] Mulvey, (2006), 165
[71] Mulvey, (2006), 165-6

New technologies therefore have the capacity to wholly undermine the gendered relations of looking produced by the conflation of the cinematic apparatus and the patriarchal culture that underpinned 1950s Hollywood cinema. But perhaps more significantly, this new found aesthetics of delay, may also have the capacity to destabilise gendered performance itself. As Mulvey suggests:

> Star performance depends on pose, moments of almost invisible stillness, in which the body is displayed for the spectator's visual pleasure…Female screen performance has always, quite overtly, included this kind of exhibitionistic display. But the delayed cinema reveals that the stillness and pose of the male star may be more masked, but is still an essential attribute of his screen performance.[72]

As such, the spectator's ability to freeze the flow of the film has the capacity to undermine stereotypical notions that underpin representations of gender and sexual difference on the screen. And by extension, the collapsing of gender difference on-screen has the potential to lead the spectator to question essential differences between the genders more generally.

In her later work, Mulvey has done much to assuage her detractors. In contrast to her seminal essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', Mulvey recognises and acknowledges the specificity of Hollywood cinema in the Classical era and the social and historical contingency of the spectatorial pleasures to be found there. Moreover, the proliferation of new technologies for viewing film has led her to develop an understanding of spectator-text relations that recognises that the spectator's investments in and engagements with the screen might be more multiple and diverse than her original essay suggested. In *Death 24x a Second* Mulvey also undoes the essential passivity that characterised her early formulations of spectatorship. The contemporary spectator is no longer at the mercy of the relentless flow of the cinematic apparatus, and as a result, the discovery and elaboration of an oppositional aesthetic that was central to Mulvey's original feminist agenda, is to be found not only in the technologies of production, but also in the technologies of consumption.

As Mulvey rightly suggests, this kind of digital, interactive spectatorship "affects the internal pattern of narrative: sequences can be easily skipped or repeated, overturning hierarchies of privilege, and setting up unexpected links

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[72] Mulvey, (2006), 162-3

that displace the chain of meaning…attacking the text's original cohesion."[73] For Mulvey such an attack has immense political potential in helping to erase sexual difference within film. Indeed the potential for the spectator to use an aesthetic of delay to read a text "perversely against the grain of the film",[74] opens up the potential for the spectator to resist the prevailing ideology of gender, and in the process to become both more active and empowered. However, this shift in power from the producer to the consumer brings with it a number of cultural anxieties.

As we shall see later in this thesis, the capacity of the spectator to intervene in the flow of narrative and to wrest images and scenes from their original context, is an explicit source of regulatory concern. As a result, the BBFC *Guidelines* suggest that classification decisions with regard to video works will be stricter precisely because they may be "replayed or viewed out of context".[75] Similarly, this shift in power has provoked theorists and film-makers alike to speculate on the deleterious effects of giving control over the spectator. Drawing on an interview with Federico Fellini, Richard Rushton suggests that, while the capacity to interact with the film text may to some extent radicalize it, this manipulation means that:

> Film loses its autonomy, it loses its separation from me, it loses its challenge to me, and merely becomes and object *for me…*with modes of reception like…interactivity, cinema will no longer be able to offer any challenges to spectators. Any challenges will be instantly dismissed, obliterated, so that…the sanctity of any viewing subject will not be ruffled.[76]

What these anxieties and criticisms suggest however, is not so much a fundamental problem with Mulvey's conceptualisation of contemporary, digital spectatorship. Rather they provide a revealing insight into the way in which viewers are perceived by certain sectors of our culture. These formulations of the spectator are both somewhat disparaging, suggesting that s/he is at best lazy and vulnerable, and at worst dangerous and insular.

Rushton's project, it should be noted, is not to criticize the work of Mulvey per se, but rather to explore the potential of a Deleuzian formulation of spectatorship. Nevertheless, with respect to his criticisms, the act of choosing whether or not to watch a 'challenging' or 'intimidating' film by Bergman or Antonioni pre-dates the invention of the television remote. Similarly, despite the

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[73] Mulvey, (2006), 27-8
[74] Mulvey, (2006), 166
[75] British Board of Film Classification. *Guidelines*, (London: BBFC, 2009), 11
[76] Richard Rushton, 'Deleuzian Spectatorship', *Screen* 50, no.1, (Spring 2009): 52

narrative's relentless flow in the cinematic apparatus, spectators were never forced to endure films they did not enjoy. Leaving the cinema or simply refusing to see the film in the first place has always been an option. However, the value of Rushton's criticism is in its careful differentiation between being *physically* active, in freezing, skipping and repeating, and being *critically* active, in questioning the ideological assumptions that underpin the text. Mulvey herself sees the process of halting the film as enabling critical intervention, or at the very least a kind of pleasure "reminiscent of the processes of textual analysis that open up understanding".[77] But for Rushton this new form of spectatorial 'activity' is replete with "an attitude of maintaining the certainty of one's own thoughts and refusing the invitation to think another's thoughts or to experience another's sensations."[78]

Rushton's radical reassertion of the liberating qualities of passivity notwithstanding, Mulvey's formulation of the spectator retains a kind of technological determinism. While she may acknowledge the social and historical contingency of spectatorship, and the specificity of contemporary modes of 'pensive' and 'possessive' spectatorship, in Mulvey's view these "emerge from a delayed cinema".[79] To put it another way, while new technologies have enabled the contemporary spectator to escape the narrative flow, seemingly so central to the his or her ideological interpellation within the cinematic apparatus, the spectator's capacity to intervene and undermine the deterministic features of the text, depend precisely on his or her use of new technologies. Which leaves the question of how the viewing relations of the contemporary *cinema* spectator have been constructed, entirely unanswered.

Machines of the Visible

The second challenge to metapsychological theory has come from studies of visual culture. In particular, proponents of visual culture have moved away from a characterisation of the cinema as a restaging of the universal *mise-*

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[77] Mulvey, (2006), 28
[78] Rushton, (2009), 53
[79] Mulvey, (2006), 11

en-scène of the psyche, or as a site of primal desires and drives, and have sought instead to highlight the socially constructed nature of cinema and the social and historical specificity of spectatorial relations. Moreover, studies of visual culture have criticised the singular focus on visual perception within the cinema, and as a result have attempted to account for a more corporeal relation with the screen.

Precursors of the contemporary concern with the analysis of visual culture include Jean-Louis Comolli who during the late 1970s and early 1980s worked to explore the notion of the apparatus without relying on speculative accounts of the mirror stage, oedipal desires or scopic drives. Instead, Comolli asserted a 'materialist' account of the development of cinema, which argued that cinema is more than simply an arrangement of instruments: camera, screen, projector. It is a social machine, born "from the anticipation and confirmation of its social profitability; economic, ideological and symbolic."[80] Indeed, Comolli argues that all the elements of cinema, (camera, projector, 'strip of images') "were already there, more or less ready, more or less invented, a long time already before the formal invention of cinema". [81] What was missing from these early technologies however, was "the arrangement of demands, desires, fantasies, speculations (in the two senses of commerce and the imaginary): an arrangement which gives apparatus and techniques a social status and function."[82] But while the cinema may depend on the fantasies and desires of the public for its invention, Comolli does not attempt to account for their source or structure. Rather he sketches a history of cinema "as an intersection of technical, aesthetic, social and ideological determinations."[83]

For Comolli cinema participates in what he terms the 'ideology of the visible'. The 'impression of reality' is not the result of the arrangement of the cinematic machinery. Rather it arises through a cultural insistence on the relation between truth and vision. As he puts it, "cinema postulated that from the 'real' to the visual and from the visual to its filmed reproduction a same truth was infinitely reflected, without distortion or loss."[84] Comolli suggests that this assertion is the result of technologically determinist accounts of the origins of cinema, which stress the technical nature of the machinery involved, and

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[80] Jean-Louis Comolli, 'Machines of the Visible', in *The Cinematic Apparatus*, ed. Teresa de Lauretis and Stephen Heath, (New York: St Martin's Press, 1980), 122
[81] Comolli, (1980), 122
[82] Comolli, (1980), 122
[83] Lev Manovich, 'Assembling Reality: Myths of Computer Graphics', *Afterimage* 20, no.2, (September 1992): 12
[84] Serge Daney, 'Sur Salador', *Cahiers du Cinema,* no. 222, (July 1970) : 39, in Comolli, (1980), 126

emphasise the precision of the camera/lens in capturing the profilmic event. However, this description of cinema not only neglected an analysis of cinema as a 'social machine', but in collapsing the whole machinery of cinema to a single optical instrument such analyses were symptomatic of a wider 'hegemony of the eye', which places human vision at the centre of representation, to the exclusion of other forms of representational practice:

> It is therefore necessary to change perspective, that is, to take into account what the gesture picking out the camera sets aside in its movement, in order to avoid that the stress on the camera – necessary and productive – is not reinscribed in the very ideology to which it points.[85]

For Comolli then, these accounts of the history and functioning of cinema are clearly reductive, precluding questions about the wider economic and ideological forces that work to shape both the technology of cinema and the codes and conventions that govern its texts.

The Corporeal Subject

Like Comolli, Jonathan Crary is also concerned with the 'hegemony of the eye', but for him, the question is not how we have come to understand cinema so much as how subjectivity itself has been produced. As he suggests in *Techniques of the Observer,*[86] film theory, like the history of art, tends to rely on the shifts in representational practice in order to account for changes in the viewing subject; a perspective which simply cannot account for the ways in which vision itself has been historically constructed. Like Metz and Baudry, Crary's project is to reveal the apparatus that structures the subjectivity of the viewer. However, Crary eschews any metapsychological approach to the apparatus, and draws instead on a more Foucaultian notion of the *dispositif* in his analysis of the social, technological, institutional and discursive relations that shape both models of vision and the observer. His project is to uncover the "massive reorganization of knowledge and social practices that modified in

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[85] Comolli, (1980), 126-127
[86] Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, (Cambridge, Mass: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1992)

myriad ways the productive, cognitive, and desiring capacities of the human subject."[87]

By analysing the discourses of physiology in the early 1800's and tracing the development of certain optical technologies Crary aims to sketch the "crucial ways in which vision was discussed, controlled, and incarnated in cultural and scientific practices"[88] in this era. In particular, he seeks to demonstrate that the spectator was not always conceived as a disembodied subject constituted through a 'pure act of perception'. But rather, in the early nineteenth century there was a radical rupture in the way in which the "observer was figured in a wide range of social practices and domains of knowledge."[89] More specifically, Crary contrasts two kinds of visual technologies, the camera obscura and the stereoscope, "not for the models of representation they imply"[90], but as "points of intersection where philosophical, scientific, and aesthetic discourses overlap with mechanical techniques, institutional requirements, and socioeconomic forces."[91] That is, Crary interprets these optical devices "as sites of both knowledge and power that operate directly on the body of the individual."[92]

For Crary, the camera obscura represents more than a simple form of entertainment. Rather, since the beginning of the 1500s, the camera obscura has been the dominant model used to explain human vision, and the relationship between the perceiving subject and external reality. For over two hundred years, Crary explains, the camera obscura was not only a means of scientific inquiry and artistic practice, but it also acted as the singular metaphor used within philosophy to explain how the act of observation can yield truthful inferences about the world. Moreover, this model of 'objective' vision presented a corollary account of subjectivity, which has persisted in contemporary accounts of spectatorship.

Indeed Crary suggests that these theories of the spectator posit cinema as the culmination of technologies that began with the 'camera obscura'. As a result they see cinema as analogous to a prior technology which necessarily isolates and individuates, creating in the process an "observer who is nominally a free sovereign individual and a privatised subject confined in a quasi-domestic space, cut off from a public exterior world."[93] In addition, the model of the

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[87] Crary, (1992), 3
[88] Crary, (1992), 7
[89] Crary, (1992), 7
[90] Crary, (1992), 7
[91] Crary, (1992), 8
[92] Crary, (1992), 7
[93] Crary, (1992), 39

camera obscura decisively severed the connection between the act of seeing and the physical body of the observer. In Crary's terms, it 'decorporealised' vision, by positing a site in which "the observer's physical and sensory experience is supplanted by the relations between a mechanical apparatus and a pre-given world of objective truth"[94], becoming in the process "a disembodied witness to a mechanical and transcendental representation of the objectivity of the world."[95]

As a result, theories of subjectivity based on the model of the camera obscura, including the discussions of cinematic spectatorship which followed, present the spectator as a disembodied, masterful eye; a transcendental subject of vision. But further, as Comolli would suggest, the model of the camera obscura becomes a cornerstone of the 'ideology of the visible' insofar as it both posits a veridical relationship between truth and vision, and it suggests a spectator who is "independent of the machinery of representations", a machinery which "prevents the observer from seeing his or her position as part of the representation."[96]

However, in the early nineteenth century, a number of medical researchers began to challenge the idea that the eye was simply a neutral register, like the empty interior space of the camera obscura. Goethe, for example, used the example of the retinal afterimage to demonstrate that vision was an amalgam of physiological processes and external stimulation. These afterimages, which had been observed since antiquity, had previously been considered only as illusions, outside the margins of the domain of optics. But in the early nineteenth century these experiences became central to the understanding of vision. Goethe had produced an image of "a newly productive observer whose body had a range of capacities to generate visual experience…visual experience that does not refer or correspond to anything external to the observing subject."[97]

This privileging of the body as visual producer immediately began to collapse the distinction between inner and outer upon which the model of the camera obscura was based. The eye was no longer considered to work in a disembodied fashion, capturing sights in an objective manner. Vision was found to be subjective, a distinctly temporal unfolding of processes within the body. For Crary, this new science of vision produces "a moment when the visible

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[94] Crary, (1992), 39
[95] Crary, (1992), 41
[96] Crary, (1992), 41
[97] Crary, (1992), 27

escapes from the timeless incorporeal order of the camera obscura and becomes lodged in another apparatus, within the unstable physiology and temporality of the human body."[98] Vision therefore, came to be understood as an organic, bodily mechanism fundamentally implicated in the failings of the human body, and entirely susceptible to misperception. The eye and the mind could be tricked. But more than this, the eye was reconfigured as part of the body, vision was as much a sensation as touch, and moreover, the sensations of the body were understood to be linked. Vision had a physiological and bodily basis.

In contrast to the camera obscura then, the stereoscope was developed on the basis of research carried out in the 1820s and 1830s on subjective vision. It presented two non-identical images of the same scene, that when viewed through a device with two lenses, offers the viewer a three-dimensional image. The stereoscope, in Crary's view, radically breaks down the disembodied, monocular and centred subject implied by Renaissance perspective. Indeed, as Crary puts it:

> Perspective is not even a possibility under the terms of this technique of beholding. An observer no longer sees an image that has an intelligible or quantifiable location in space, but rather a hallucinatory composite of two dissimilar images whose positions refer to the anatomical structure of the observer's body.[99]

The stereoscope therefore incorporates the body in its mode of consumption in two ways. Firstly, the ability to perceive the three-dimensional image depends on a direct physical engagement with the optical apparatus, itself modelled on the 'awkward binocular body'. And secondly, the text or image depends on the human observer for its verisimilitude. Indeed, as Crary suggests, the stereoscopic image doesn't actually exist, it is an illusion created as a direct result of the observer's physiologically determined experience of the two images.

The observer of the stereoscopic image therefore, has achieved a new 'corporeality of vision'. Within his model, the boundaries between the body and the image break down. Looking at an image stimulates the eye; it is, in itself, a sensation. Moreover, it also blurs the boundaries between the body and the machine. The eye does not passively observe an external reality presented by the workings of the apparatus; the body must become part of the optical

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[98] Crary, (1992), 70
[99] Crary, (1992), 128

machinery in order for a coherent image to exist. The stereoscope cannot function without the presence of, and without the specific qualities of the physical, bodily eye.

The demise of the stereoscope as a popular form of visual consumption, and the radical reassertion of the camera obscura as a model of representation, vision and subjectivity in the development and dissemination of photography and cinema throughout the twentieth century, does not undermine the insight provided by these alternative forms of spectatorship. Crary however, may not put it in such terms. Throughout his study he self-consciously abandons the term spectator in favour of the term observer. Unlike 'spectator', which has its roots in the latin *spectare,* 'to look at', Crary adopts the term 'observer', from *observare,* 'to conform one's actions, to comply with'. But this is no mere semantic quarrel. Crary chooses the term in order to highlight the fact that questions of vision and technologies of the image and representation are "fundamentally questions about the body and the operation of social power."[100] That is, "vision and its effects are always inseparable from the possibilities of an observing subject who is both the historical product and the site of certain practices, techniques, institutions, and procedures of subjectification."[101] The cinematic spectator then is not the inevitable result of the arrangement of cinematic space, nor yet a simple effect of the text, but a subject produced through a plethora of discourses and practices.

Despite the triumph of the monocular perspective in popular visual entertainment, and the re-emergence of the camera obscura as an explanatory model within classical film theory, both of which are founded "on the denial of the body, its pulsings and phantasms, as the ground of vision"[102], the value of Crary's project lies in the fact he

> begins to speak of spectatorship without invoking the judgement against its bodily implications that have been in effect since Plato: that the image's seduction of the body is to be defended against by models of vision that emphasize control, mastery, and knowledge rather than pleasure, implication, and assault.[103]

As Williams suggests, Crary's work profoundly affects our thinking about spectatorship and the pleasures of cinema. However, while Crary's sketch of nineteenth century discourses of the observer help us to see the socio-historical

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[100] Crary, (1992), 3
[101] Crary, (1992), 5
[102] Jonathan Crary, 'Techniques of the Observer', in *October* 45, (Summer, 1988), 35
[103] Linda Williams 'Introduction', Williams, (1997), 7-8

specificity of classical film theory's 'disembodied spectator', I am sceptical about the degree to which the reinsertion of the body into discourses cinematic consumption breaks down the moral suspicion that accompanies such bodily pleasures. Indeed as I will seek to show within this thesis, while the physicality of cinematic pleasure is clearly emphasised within film marketing to the extent that the typical Hollywood action film is likely to offer itself up as a 'roller coaster ride of a movie', and the contemporary horror film will highlight, perhaps even exaggerate its capacity to provoke the physical experience of fear or revulsion, the rigorous policing of cinema in the United Kingdom by the British Board of Film Classification, as well as the frequent moral panics about the effects of sex and violence in the moving image, reveal the profound anxiety that the 'image's seduction of the body' provokes. Even amongst the more legitimate or mundane sections of cinema, those genres which conspicuously display bodies on screen and consciously attempt to register their sensational effects in the bodies of the viewer, have been a allotted a conspicuously low cultural status,[104] highlighting the profound mistrust that cultural commentators have of the bodily pleasures.

Moreover, attempts by writers such as Steven Shaviro to radically reinsert the body into film theory, have perhaps inadvertently strengthened the moral suspicion that surrounds the visceral thrills of cinema. Shaviro's intention in his book *The Cinematic Body* is, of course, quite different. Most obviously, he is concerned to sweep away the legacy of psychoanalytic film theory and assert a model of spectatorship that rests upon the physical and affective experience of cinema. Drawing on the work of Deleuze and Guattari, Shaviro suggests that "the overwhelming experience of visual fascination in the cinema…is one of radical passivity."[105] This notion of 'radical passivity' seeks to undo the active-male/passive-female binary that underpinned Mulvey's early film theory, at the same time as it suggests a mode of relating to the screen as a thoroughly embodied process.

For Shaviro, "cinematic images are not representations, but *events".*[106] That is:

> Film viewing offers an immediacy and violence of sensation
> that powerfully engages the eye and body of the
> spectator…Images confront the viewer directly, without

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[104] Linda Williams, 'Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess', in *Film Quarterly* 44, No 4, (Summer 1991), 4

[105] Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body,* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 48

[106] Shaviro, (1993), 24

mediation…We respond viscerally to visual forms before we have the leisure to read or interpret them.[107]

As such, the spectator experiences the film directly through the body, with a speed and intensity that precludes any critical or analytic distance from the images and sensations that bombard him or her. Shaviro sees this intense physical engagement with the screen as preceding any act of analysis or interpretation, indeed ruling out this kind of activity of 'reading' at the moment of consumption, in favour of a 'raw' experience of visceral affect. As he puts it, "the experience of watching a film remains stubbornly…prereflective…any detachment from 'raw phenomena'…is radically impossible."[108]

In contrast to the figurations of the classical apparatus theories of Metz and Baudry, the spectator does not respond to an image as if it were a real object; s/he responds to the image itself. S/he is affected not by any supposed representational verisimilitude of the image, but by the visceral insistence of its presence and its movement. It is not a question of cinema's 'reality effect', the reactions of viewers cannot be characterised as a hallucinatory belief in the reality of the illusion. Rather, the spectator's heightened involvement with the image is more in the order of the direct stimulation of the optic nerves, bypassing the cognitive and reflective faculties altogether.

The value of Shaviro's work lies in his recognition that the body is absolutely central to cinematic subjectivity. Moreover, Shaviro takes pains to remind us of the constructed nature of the body when he argues that, "the opposition between the biological and the cultural is a false one, for the…body is [always] steeped in and invested by culture." [109] Bodies then are not 'natural' entities, they are objects thoroughly invested with power. A power which has the potential "to colonise bodies" and to "channel the modes of sensory perception".[110] Indeed as Foucault argues, "deployments of power are directly connected to the body – to bodies, functions, physiological processes, sensations, and pleasures".[111] Bodies, and hence the experiences and sensations gained through those bodies are profoundly shaped by the culture in which we live. Indeed Shaviro suggests that contemporary theory ought to be "a

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[107] Shaviro, (1993), 25-6
[108] Shaviro, (1993), 32
[109] Shaviro, (1993), 59
[110] Shaviro, (1993), 21
[111] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1,* translated by Robert Hurley, (London: Penguin, 1990), 151

question of learning to analyse the politics of the regulation of bodies, and of the distribution of pleasures and pains".[112]

There is, therefore, a significant disjuncture between this argument and his insistence on the "primordial forms of raw sensation: affect, excitation, stimulation and repression, pleasure and pain, shock and habit."[113] Shaviro's insistence on the violence and the immediacy of the image is partly a concern to break down the mind/body divide that lies behind classical film theory and eradicate the idea of the transcendent, disembodied subject. It is also partly a demonstration of his commitment to a Deleuzian notion of radical passivity, in which it is only through giving up control and forgetting oneself in the face of the cinema screen that one is able to truly open oneself up to another's way of seeing, experiencing and knowing the world.

So while in the first instance Shaviro's intention is to refute the idea that the cinematic experience is primarily a cognitive one, his insistence on the 'rawness' of film, and the 'immediacy' with which the spectator is affected, means that he elides the culturally constructed nature of experience itself. That is, the body is never 'raw', and nor is it simply a palimpsest upon which culture has been inscribed, rather the body itself is culturally constructed,[114] and as a result our direct experiences are always in some way mediated by the culture in which we live. Indeed, as we have learned from anthropologists, even our most visceral of reactions are profoundly shaped by culture.[115] In seeking to dispel the Cartesian myth through an insistence on the physicality of cinema, I would suggest that Shaviro has also expelled the 'layers' of culture which shape our perception at the most fundamental level.

Moreover, any political commitment to Shaviro's notion of 'radical passivity' is inherently risky. Firstly, as Richard Rushton suggests, opening "ourselves up to other ways of experiencing and knowing…is by no means a tactic free of peril – one can be as much absorbed by *Triumph of the Will* (Leni Riefenstahl, 1935) as by *Sans Soliel* (Chris Marker, 1983); and films can deliver to us the brains of idiots as much as it can deliver brains of inspiration of genius."[116] Rushton's choice of films is illustrative here as it suggests his

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[112] Shaviro, (1993), 59
[113] Shaviro, (1993), 26
[114] See Judith Butler, *Bodies that matter: on the discursive limits of 'sex',* (London: Routledge, 1993)
[115] For examples see Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger,* (London: Routledge, 1984) and Monique Smeets and Pamela Dalton, 'The nose of the beholder', in *The Aroma-Chology Review* 8 (2000)
[116] Rushton, (2009), 53

residual discomfort at simply giving oneself over to a text suffused with ideology with which he (presumably) does not agree.

The second related issue is with Shaviro's characterisation of the cinematic experience itself:

> Images…affect me in a manner that does not leave room for any suspension of response. I have already been touched and altered by these sensations, even before I have had the chance to become conscious of them…There is no way to watch a film without allowing this to happen; I can resist it only by giving up on the film altogether, by shutting my eyes or walking out… as I watch, I have no presence of mind: sight and hearing, anticipation and memory, are no longer my own. My responses are not internally motivated and are not spontaneous; they are forced upon me from beyond.[117]

While there is certainly a universalising tendency at work here, Shaviro's description pertains to what he calls 'cinematic fascination', and indeed in this regard, the account above speaks volumes about Shaviro's own cinephilia. The difficulty with Shaviro's model of spectatorship however, is not the passivity of the spectator per se, but rather it is his description of the immediacy and force of the image. That is, it appears to wrest any sense of agency or interpretive capacity away from the spectator in favour of a text which does not merely determine but forces a particular response. This characterisation of spectator/text relations therefore flies in the face of the many audience studies which seek to highlight the diverse range of readings and responses viewers have in relation to media texts. Shaviro might argue that audiences only come to report a diverse set of responses and readings after the filmic event, thereby reflecting on the experience only after it has occurred, and as such they do not necessarily undermine his description of the event itself. He nevertheless leaves very little room for any consideration of how those immediate responses, (in the sense of happening in the present rather than in the sense of unmediated), might themselves be shaped both by the context of viewing and by the prevailing culture within which this occurs.

The other more troubling issue with Shaviro's model of cinematic fascination is that it sits uncomfortably close to the models of viewing that underpin the 'media effects' debates. In that Shaviro describes not just an 'opening of oneself to an experience', but in his choice of language he attributes to the film text a form power and control that the viewer is seemingly helpless to resist. In Shaviro's words he is 'altered' by the sensations of film quite before he

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[117] Shaviro, (1993), 46-9

has the opportunity to reflect on what is happening on the screen, and before he is even conscious of them. Moreover, he suggests those responses are 'forced' on the viewer by the text. The 'risk' Rushton identifies in opening oneself up to the experience of a film that may be ideologically unsound, becomes all the more acute in the context of viewing depictions of sexual violence. As we shall see, the fears that circulate around such images are, precisely, that one might be 'altered' without being conscious of it, that one's responses might be wholly determined by the text, and that one is helpless to resist unless one chooses to look away or to leave the cinema. Indeed, it is these very suggestions that form the basis for the argument for the institutional censorship of film. As such, the choice to adopt Shaviro's model of spectatorship risks exacerbating the cultural anxiety provoked by the 'image's seduction of the body' rather than helping us to challenge it.

In contrast to Shaviro's assertion of 'radical passivity', Vivian Sobchack adopts a more phenomenological approach to the problem of the body within film theory. Unlike Metz and Baudry, Sobchack does not see the cinema as a re-enactment of the *mise-en-scène* of the psyche. Rather, as Laura Marks point out, the mirror phase upon which their theories are based construct a "fundamentally alienated selfhood that is constructed visually".[118] As such, these theories have "ignored or elided both cinema's sensual address and the viewer's 'corporeal-material' being."[119] In using phenomenology to approach and describe the film experience then, Sobchack's project is to challenge this elision and counter the separation of visuality from the body. As Sobchack explains:

> Our vision is always already "fleshed out". Even at the movies our vision and hearing are informed and given meaning by our other modes of sensory means of access to the world: our capacity not only to see and to hear, but also to touch, to smell, to taste, and always to proprioceptively feel our weight, dimension, gravity, and movement in the world. In sum, the film experience is meaningful *not to the side of our bodies, but because of our bodies*.[120]

Cinema, in other words, does not merely address "a disincarnate eye and ear",[121] rather it should be conceived as a medium that addresses the whole body. However, unlike Shaviro's radically passive and somewhat masochistic

[118] Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses,* (London: Duke University Press, 2000), 15
[119] Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 56
[120] Sobchack, (2004), 60
[121] Shaviro, (1993), 26-27

notion of the spectator, Sobchack's spectator is not subjected to the text. Instead she elaborates an encounter between the spectator and the text that is fundamentally dialogical, in that both the spectator and the film are mutually constituted for and by one another.

For Sobchack, a film is not an empty set of flickering images; it is experienced by the viewer as an intentional subject. That is, "the moving picture makes itself sensuously and sensibly manifest as the expression of experience by experience."[122] Or to put it another way, when watching a stream of moving images the spectator not only sees a world opening out before him or her, but also interprets those images as the product of the lived choices of another subject. Moreover, Sobchack suggests, the vision with which the viewer is presented "is informed and charged by other modes of perception, and thus implicates a *sighted body* rather than merely transcendental eyes."[123] The film experience then becomes a "*shared* space of being, of seeing, hearing, and bodily and reflective movement performed and experienced by both film and viewer."[124] As Marks explains:

> If one understands cinema viewing as an exchange between
> two bodies – that of the viewer and that of the film – then the
> characterization of the film viewer as passive, vicarious, or
> projective must be replaced with a model of a viewer who
> participates in the production of cinematic experience.[125]

Far from being subjected to a text then, the viewer must negotiate its meaning, "contribute to and perform the constitution of its experiential significance."[126]

For Sobchack then, meaning does not have a discrete origin in either the body or the image but emerges from their fusion in what she calls the *cinesthetic subject*. The cinesthetic subject is a neologism that Sobchack derives from both *cinema*, and two scientific terms *synaesthesia* and *coenaesthesia*. The first is a psycho-neurological condition which is defined as an "*involuntary experience* in which the stimulation of one sense causes a perception in another",[127] though Sobchack uses the term more generally to refer to the exchange and translation between and among the senses. While the second, "names the potential and

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[122] Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye. A Phenomenology of Film Experience.* (Princeton,: Princeton University Press, 1992), 3-4

[123] Sobchack, (1992), 133

[124] Sobchack, (1992), 10

[125] Laura U. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media,* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002)

[126] Sobchack, (1992), 10

[127] Richard E. Cytowic, M.D., *The Man Who Tasted Shapes: A Bizarre Medical History Offers Revolutionary Insights into Emotions, Reasoning, and Consciousness,* (New York: warner, 1993), 52, quoted in Sobchack, (2004), 67

perception of one's whole sensorial being."[128] It is a foundation upon which culture acts, arranging our senses according to the dominant hierarchy of the time. In short, "coenaesthesia refers to the way in which equally available senses become variously heightened and diminished, the power of history and culture regulating their boundaries as it arranges them into a normative hierarchy."[129]

In watching a film, all of our senses are mobilised, and perception becomes a bodily act. But "often, depending on the particular solicitations of a given film or filmic moment, our naturalized sensory hierarchy and habitual sensual economy are altered and rearranged."[130] The sensing body of the spectator then, in Sobchack's view is malleable, and film itself has the potential to enable a re-ordering of the lived experience of the body. Sobchack's cinesthetic subject therefore, is a 'lived body' that subverts the dominant model of objectifying vision that reduces our experience of cinema to the limited level of sight. The spectator's body becomes the site that mediates between vision and language, between experience and the image, in order to 'make sense' of the film. As such, Sobchack's theory not only challenges classical notions of the 'disembodied' spectator, but in presenting such a highly malleable notion of the sensing body produced through culture, Sobchack presents a model that not only recognises the sensual vagaries of culture but also highlights the particular ability of film to form, manipulate and even subvert dominant perceptive modes. Sobchack therefore highlights that the 'perceptive sensorium' is never natural, even at the point where the viewer is most immediately affected by a film, the experience is nevertheless produced through the 'immanent mediation' of the encultured body. In this respect, Sobchack has much in common with the work of Laura Marks.

In her study of a range of intercultural films, Marks is concerned to produce a model of what she terms 'haptic visuality'. As Marks explains, "haptic *perception* is usually defined as the combination of tactile, kinaesthetic, and proprioceptive functions, the way we experience touch both on the surface of and inside our bodies. In haptic *visuality*, the eyes themselves function like organs of touch."[131] Haptic visuality is distinct from what Marks terms the optical visuality that characterises much of mainstream cinema. As such, haptic images do not appeal to visual mastery, and nor do they address a distant and

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[128] Sobchack, (2004), 68
[129] Sobchack, (2004), 69
[130] Sobchack, (2004), 80
[131] Marks, (2002), 2

disembodied viewer. On the contrary, "haptic images invite the viewer to dissolve his or her subjectivity in the close and bodily contact with the image".[132] However, as Marks suggests this appeal to the body can be profoundly uncomfortable for the viewer, since in Western culture olfactory, tactile and other forms of bodily knowledge are little valued. Indeed, "'sensual abandon' is a phrase of Enlightenment subjectivity, implying that the senses…dull the powers of the intellect. It implies that the…desire for the sense experience…is in part a desire to stop thinking".[133] Haptic cinema refutes the opposition between the mind and the body, and instead asks the viewer to think through the body, which as Marks explains, "this is not a call for wilful regression but to recognizing the intelligence of the perceiving body."[134]

Marks therefore expounds a theory of embodiment in which bodies are not merely inscribed with meaning, but have the capacity to produce meaning. Further, Marks argues that, in contrast to Steven Shaviro, her exploration of the sensuous experience is not an attempt to uncover the 'raw' sensation of the cinematic experience. On the contrary, "by paying attention to bodily and sensuous experience, we will find that it is to a large degree informed by culture. Perception is already informed by culture, and so even illegible images are (cultural) perceptions, not raw sensations."[135] Moreover, this process of somatic enculturation also leads to the encoding of power relations within the body. The experience of intercultural film can therefore lead the viewer to recognise the ways in which "power relations are built into cultural organizations of perception."[136]

Like Sobchack then, Marks sees intercultural cinema as having the potential to challenge the dominant cultural hierarchy. However, it cannot transform the cultural organisation of the senses in any simple way. Like Sobchack, Marks draws on a phenomenological account of the film experience. She sees the spectator as being engaged in a dialogical relation with the film, rather than being wholly produced through the process of textual positioning. The film and the spectator mutually constitute one another, and as such, they are never "precisely congruent".[137] For Sobchack this means that the viewer is always in a position to witness the activity of the film body in its perceiving of the world. The viewer can see the act of seeing as well as the seen, and feel the

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[132] Marks, (2002), 13
[133] Marks, (2000), 118-9
[134] Marks, (2002), 18
[135] Marks, (2000), 145
[136] Marks, (2000), 153
[137] Sobchack, (1992), 10

act of movement as well as see the moved. Film therefore possesses its own distinct bodily agency, intentionality, and subjectivity, that is experienced by the viewer as "an anonymous, mobile, embodied, and ethically invested *subject* of worldly space."[138] The spectator therefore is never fully absorbed by the image, but always retains some degree of awareness of their difference from the film subject.

In the context of intercultural film, Marks suggests:

> The cinematic encounter takes place not only between my body and the film's body, but my sensorium and the film's sensorium…One could say that intercultural spectatorship is the meeting of two different sensoria, which may or may not intersect viewers may miss some multisensory images…For example, when a work is viewed in a cultural context different from that within which it was produced… And then again, viewers in the intercultural encounter may discover sense information that was not obvious in the original context [139]

The reading of the intercultural image therefore depends on the kinds of embodied knowledge the viewer brings to the film encounter. However, since sense experience is something that can be learned and cultivated, perhaps even through the medium of film itself, Marks suggests that intercultural cinema has the potential to generate new forms of relation to the world that fundamentally challenge "global culture's increasing simulation of sensory experience."[140]

The value of this approach to the question of the spectator is to be found partly in the presumed agency of the spectator. However, Marks is keen to point out that while the spectator might be seen to be active, it is not a reformulation of the critically active, Brechtian spectator. Rather, in haptic visuality the viewer is invited to relinquish "her own sense of separateness from the image – not to know it, but to give herself up to her desire for it."[141] In this respect, Marks shares Shaviro's commitment to giving oneself over to the image in order to see the world from another's perspective. However, Marks also explicitly addresses the way in which our bodies are shaped and invested by power and culture, producing forms of experience and perceptions of the world that have become so naturalised that they appear to be 'raw' or innate rather than culturally constructed. In recognising that culture pervades the body and shapes even our most immediate responses Marks helps us, precisely, to 'denaturalise' or 'make

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[138] Sobchack, (2004), 94-95
[139] Marks, (2000), 153
[140] Marks, (2000), 23
[141] Marks, (2000), 183

strange' the taken for granted responses that viewers have to cinema more generally.

Further, Sobchack suggests that the development a sense of the viewer's embodied experience of film

> lays the foundations for a *materialist*…understanding of *aesthetics* and *ethics*. That is…an appreciation of how our lived bodies provide the material premises that enable us, from the first, to sense and respond to the world and others – not only grounding the logical premises of aesthetics and ethics in 'carnal thoughts' but also charging our conscious awareness with the energies and obligations that animate our 'sensibility' and 'responsibility'.[142]

That is, the intersubjective quality of being in the world that allows us to experience others, not as objects but as subjects, and more particularly to experience this materially, through the body, allows us to develop an empathetic relation with others based on one's recognition of the commensurate quality of their subjective experience. In other words a recognition that others are made of the 'selfsame flesh' that we are.[143] In this respect, witnessing an act of suffering, at the hands of a natural disaster, in the grip of debilitating illness or, "more horrific to contemplate", at the mercy of "wilful acts of torture", invites us to consider what it is to suffer a "*diminution* of subjectivity" and come to an awareness of what it is to be treated merely as an object or thing. As Sobchack puts it:

> The passion of suffering not only forces recognition of oneself as an *objective subject* always…open to being externally acted upon against one's volition – but also it enhances the awareness of oneself as a *subjective object*: a material being that is nonetheless capable of *feeling* what it is to be treated *only* as an object.[144]

The scene of torture or suffering then powerfully impinges on the viewer's own sense of their subjectivity, and activates in the body a sense of his/her own vulnerability to the vagaries of circumstance.

Moreover, in the cinematic encounter the viewer's ability to witness not just the events that occur within the world, but also the film body's seeing of that world, constructs cinema as an ethical space. In this respect the filmmaker's ethical relation to the world "is open to slow scrutiny by the spectator."[145] Sobchack, in this instance is talking explicitly about the representation of actual

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[142] Sobchack, (2004), 3
[143] Sobchack, (2004), 287
[144] Sobchack, (2004), 287-8
[145] Sobchack, (2004), 243

scenes of death within documentary film. Here the profoundly taboo nature of this kind of depiction leads the viewer to question the filmmaker's ethical relation to the scene. Indeed, Sobchack argues that the vision of the film *must* visibly respond to the fact it has broken this taboo and justify this "cultural transgression as not only responsive but also responsible and must make the justification itself visible."[146] In other words, the filmmaker must inscribe the scene with ethical meaning.

But further, the intersubjective nature of the cinematic encounter leads the viewer to recognise s/he too is a subject for others. That is, s/he is visible to others as a subjective and intentional being. As such, faced with the non-fictional scene of death

> the very act of looking at the film is ethically charged, and this act is itself an object of ethical judgement. That is, the viewer is – and is held – ethically responsible for his or her visible visual response. The cinematic signs of the act of viewing death provide the visible grounds on which the spectator judges not only the filmmaker's ethical response to death but also his or her own ethical response[147]

At its heart, Sobchack suggests the scene itself becomes a question of 'moral conduct' both on the part of the filmmaker and on the part of the spectator.

While Sobchack is keen to point out that fictional scenes of death are not subject to the same stringent ethical criteria as documentary footage. Fictive death is commonplace rather than taboo. It may even be the foundation of fiction film. As such "the emotion we feel as viewers in face of it, the values we put at risk in looking at it, the ethical significance we find in out encounter with it differ in kind as well as degree from the way we respond to death in the documentary."[148] However, Sobchack's notion of the ethical space of the film might be more instructive in the case of sexual and sexualised violence which is, in many respects, still constructed as 'taboo'. In this instance, Sobchack leads us to regard the depiction of rape and sexual violence as a scene in which both the filmmaker and the viewer are ethically inscribed. It allows us to think through the way in which the viewer performs his or her ethical relation to the screen, as well as to trace the multiple ways in which s/he is held accountable for his/her response by others. That is, I would contend, the viewer's visible ethical response is open to immediate scrutiny by fellow viewers, it is open to continued scrutiny as the viewer performs a considered and reflective response after the

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146 Sobchack, (2004), 243
147 Sobchack, (2004), 244
148 Sobchack, (2004), 245

film has ended, and crucially the viewer's response may also be ethically judged and evaluated by the film itself, as in the case of *Funny Games,* an issue to which we will return in the last chapter of this thesis.

For Sobchack, the peculiarity of the scene of non-fictional death produces what she terms 'the charge of the real' which exceeds the mere "'response-ability' of our actual bodies" to produce

> *an ethical charge:* one that calls forth not only response but also responsibility – not only aesthetic valuation but also ethical judgement…the viewer takes on and bears particular subjective responsibility for watching the action and, as a justification for watching, responsibility for judging the action and for calling into account – and consciousness – the criteria for doing so."[149]

In other words, faced with such a scene the viewer is 'charged' with a responsibility that requires that they do not merely respond physically, but that those physical responses are informed by a conscious, critical process of ethical judgement. Such an engagement with the text appears qualitatively distinct from Sobchack's characterisation of the cinesthetic relation to the screen, which she describes as 'pre-reflective'. For example:

> Leaving the theater because one has become literally sickened or covering one's eyes is hardly ever the outcome of a thought. It is a reflexive, protective action that attests to the literal body's reciprocal and reversible relation to the figures on the screen, to its sense of actual investment in a dense, albeit also diffuse, bodily experience"[150]

While I am certain that Sobchack herself would not see these two forms of response as being mutually exclusive, for me it begs the question of whether and how ethical responsibility might be cultural encoded within the body. That is, as Sobchack herself suggests, the viewer's experience of, and response to, a scene of death is profoundly shaped by both personal experience and cultural knowledge,[151] not least of which is his/her awareness of genre. What this implies is that the viewer's 'sense-ability' and 'response-ability', as Sobchack terms it, might be heightened or diminished as a result of the degree to which s/he perceives the depiction to transgress a cultural taboo, or to cross a personal ethical boundary. In this sense, Sobchack helps us to see how culture might not only shape the manner in which we sense and perceive the world, but how the prevailing culture in which we view a morally ambiguous or

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[149] Sobchack, (2004), 284
[150] Sobchack, (2004), 79
[151] Sobchack, (2004), 246

transgressive film might fundamentally affect not only our judgement of it, but the physical/material response we have to it. In this respect, Sobchack's phenomenological approach to cinema can help us to see how bodies themselves become subject to ethical discourse, and to follow Laura Marks, how these particular relations of power might pervade the cultural organisation of the viewer's immediate physical responses.

Audience and Reception Studies

The third and final challenge to metapsychological theory came from audience and reception studies. Spurred on by the theoretical failure of the psychoanalytic project, and by the rise of Cultural Studies as a pedagogical discipline, audience and reception studies sought to investigate the interaction between texts and audience members, as opposed to the textually constructed spectator. Adherents of this approach argued that while contemporary subjectivity was inevitably bound up with the many media representations that pervade the social world, the response of the individual audience member was by no means determined by the text. The subject of audience and reception studies was multiply constructed in a continuous negotiation between material conditions and ideology, as well as a range of social and historical categories, which are brought to bear at the moment of viewing.

The central problem of metapsychological theory from this perspective, was not simply the elision of difference, rather it was the construction of an essentially passive spectator, at the mercy of the ideological machinations of the text. Proponents such as David Morley sought to overturn this passive notion of subjectivity and "formulate a position from which we can see the person actively producing meanings from the restricted range of cultural resources which his or her structural position has allowed them access to."[152] This more active spectator, was not simply 'subjected' to the text, but actively entered into the process of reading it. As Morley suggests, the *meaning* of a text was as heterogeneous as the *reading positions* adopted by its viewers. However, this

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[152] David Morley, quoted in Graeme Turner, *British Cultural Studies: An Introduction*, (London: Routledge, 1992), 160

was about more than the mere possibility of 'negotiated meanings', or 'resistant' readings.[153] As John Fiske points out, Morley's work suggests that there is no intrinsic meaning within a text until the "moment when the discourses of the reader meet the discourses of the text".[154]

The cultural studies project then, to paraphrase John Fiske, was to discover how actual audience groups use film as part of their own (local) cultures, "that is, use it to make meanings that are useful to them in making sense of their own social experiences and therefore of themselves."[155] This approach to the viewing subject has been applied far more thoroughly to television than it has to cinema. Nevertheless, the result of this approach has been to force a recognition amongst film theorists that neither the text nor the spectator are singular, stable or pre-constituted and that both the text and the spectator are involved in the process of constituting one another. From this perspective, the cinematic experience is no longer simply a metapsychological event; it is also a deeply social one. And approaching cinematic texts in this way helps us to understand both the value of cinema within the social world, as well as the very real social and political resistances audiences have to the prevailing ideology circulated within cinema. As a result, empirical analysis has effectively challenged both the universalising and totalising tendencies of metapsychological theory.

However, the danger in focussing too narrowly on the individual pleasures and uses of cinema made by specific subcultural groups is that we end up with a series of very disparate texts. Much like the three blind men, trying to describe an elephant, specific studies of resistant groups and fan-cultures do little to help us understand the socio-historical shifts that are occurring within cinema more generally. Indeed, as Robert Stam points out, this shift in the theoretical foundations of film theory has gone hand in hand with the shifting institutional arrangements of contemporary media. As Stam puts it:

> Media theorists have stressed spectatorial agency and
> freedom, ironically, just as media production and ownership
> have become ever more centralized. Resistant readings,
> moreover, depend on a certain cultural or political preparation
> that 'primes' the spectator to read critically…[I]f disempowered
> communities can decode dominant programming through a
> resistant perspective, they can do so only to the extent that

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[153] See Stuart Hall, 'Encoding/Decoding and Encoding', in *Culture, Media, Language*, ed. Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe and Paul Willis, (London: Hutchinson, 1980)
[154] John Fiske, 'British Cultural Studies and Television', in Robert C. Allen, *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled: Television and Contemporary Criticism,* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 227
[155] Fiske, (1992), 225

their collective life and historical memory have provided an alternate framework for understanding.[156]

In finding an alternative approach to the issue of spectatorship then, one must be careful to avoid the trap of an overly celebratory account of the heterogeneous relations and freedoms of the audience, and find a way to hold in tension the various structural shifts that occur within the institution of cinema, at the same time as we recognise the socio-historically variegated nature of spectatorship.

Any discussion of spectatorship must then be cognizant of the diverse ways in which the spectator is constructed. In the analysis of the "moment when the discourses of the reader meet the discourses of the text"[157], one must explore the multiple discourses that shape this encounter. This is about far more than simply producing an account of the socio-historical construction of a particular group of people and balancing this against the ideological construction of a particular text. The study of spectatorship must recognise that cinema is a site in which text, apparatus, discourse, history and social relations work together to produce a very specific experience for the individual.

Janet Staiger for example, in her study *Perverse Spectators* offers up what she calls a "historical material approach to audiences".[158] Here she presents a series of case studies that recount specific acts of reception, within the context of broader social and historical circumstances. Indeed Staiger, in contrast to classical film theory, asserts that these contextual factors are far more important in shaping the experience of film than the text itself. And as she sees it, "these contexts involve intertextual knowledges (including norms of how to interpret sense data from moving images and sounds), personal psychologies, and sociological dynamics. The job of the reception historian is to account for events of interpretation and affective experience."[159] For Staiger then, meaning is not fixed within the text but arises out the interaction between the text and the spectator, a spectator who brings to bear a whole set of heterogeneous and contradictory social and historical relations in which they are 'embedded'. As a result these spectators both interpret and use the text in their own multiple and unpredictable ways. Staiger's work therefore overcomes the textual determinism and universalism of classical film theory, as well as the

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[156] Robert Stam, *Film Theory: An Introduction,* (London: Blackwell, 2000), 234
[157] David Morley, *The Nationwide Audience: Structure and Decoding,* (London: BFI, 1980)
[158] Janet Staiger, *Perverse Spectators: The Practices of Film Reception* (New York: New York University Press, 2000)
[159] Staiger, (2000), 1

implication in Sobchack's work that certain kinds of sensuous depiction will determine particular forms of responses.

But while Staiger suggests that the meaning of a film cannot be reduced to a single interpretation, she also criticises the work of cultural studies generally, and audience researchers specifically, who rarely "go beyond describing readers' responses in either a very general way (readers take up the position offered by the text, they resist it, or they negotiate it) or very specific ways (at best, lists of what readers do in creating alternative texts or in identifying with stars)."[160] Instead Staiger argues that the meaning of a text is shaped and informed by the social and historical circumstances within which these readings and interpretations take place. To demonstrate this she draws on a range of sources from critical reviews and journalistic debates, to viewers' letters to the editor, advertisements and fan mail. As a result, Staiger not only highlights the variety of responses to films in any given era, but she uses these texts to try and uncover what these films meant to the viewer, and crucially, how that interpretation was guided by wider discourse. Staiger therefore, focuses of the 'experience' of cinema without suggesting an essential relationship between the spectator and the text.

Similarly, in her study of the spectators of early film, Miriam Hansen has attempted to reconcile the cinematic subject with the real socially and historically situated viewer, and hence to situate cinema within the context of culture. For Hansen, spectatorship was to be considered as the mediation between the theoretical spectator and his/her real counterpart within the audience. Her work focused on historical spectatorship, and like Staiger, she sought to demonstrate that this spectator was subject to the vagaries of their social and historical placement. Hansen's spectators were not only differentiated by their position in the social world but she showed spectatorship itself was subject to change over time.

Hansen argued that spectatorship was the deliberate construction of the film industry. It was regarded as a means by which a socially and ethnically diverse cinema audience could be integrated into a standardised 'mass' to which film could be sold as a product. The spectator, in this conception, is not an inevitable result of the machinations of the apparatus. Rather, a particular form of spectatorship is produced as an effect of the development of classical modes of narration and address that occurred between 1909 and 1916. So where early

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[160] Staiger, (2000), 1

film depended on the audience's pre-existing knowledge of the story or an introduction by a lecturer, this dependence on extra-diegetic resources was rejected in favour of self-contained, self-explanatory narratives. To that end, the resources of cinematic discourse, of framing, editing and *mise-en-scène* were increasingly employed in the service of the narrative. In contrast to cinema before this period, "classical narration tailored every detail to the spectator's attention" and attempted "to enlist the spectator in the narrative by the way in which it was structured, [and] to integrate cinematic techniques in such a way as to control the vision of the audience."[161] Spectatorship then, was not an inevitable result of the cinematic apparatus, but a particular organisation of a film's internal structure.

Moreover, Hansen showed that the spectator's relation to the text was also influenced by the mode of exhibition. The demise of the nickelodeon, with its variety format, and its replacement with more traditional movie theatres dedicated to the films themselves, saw the restructuring of the social space and a decline in the typically social, distracted mode of viewing to a more absorbing, identificatory mode. However, Hansen believed that there might well be a gap between the intended effect of this reorganisation of public space and the response of the audience. She suggests that, far from being subordinated to the intentions of the film industry, early cinemagoers were able to develop an alternative social sphere, a space in which they could negotiate imaginatively between images and discourses on the screen and their own experience of life.

This kind of 'active' spectatorship contrasts both with the intentions of the film industry and with much of classical film theory, but further, in emphasising the 'public' dimension of cinema, Hansen's theory neatly escapes the universalistic conception of the theoretical spectator without descending into an unmanageable juggling act between the multiplicities of different audience views. As she puts it:

> This public dimension is distinct from both textual and social determinations of spectatorship because it entails the very moment in which reception can gain a momentum of its own, can give rise to formations not necessarily anticipated in the context of production…Although always precarious and subject to ceaseless – industrial, ideological – appropriation, the public dimension of the cinematic institution harbours a potentially autonomous dynamic[162]

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[161] Hansen, (1991), 79
[162] Hansen, (1991), 7

This concept of the 'public' maintains the tension between the textually constructed spectator and the audience member. It emphasises not only the contingency of individual acts of reception, but also the social contingencies within which the historical spectator is able to interpret the films they see.

The value of Hansen's work for a theory of cinematic subjectivity lies in the empirical nature of her work. Her analysis of the films of Rudolf Valentino, for example, Hansen finds a feminine address and a male body represented as a desirable object. Her methodology escapes the bounds of a universalising tendency among film theoreticians by focussing on the particularities of the internal structure and modes of address within film. Moreover, Hansen gives a broader vision of cinema by moving outside of the narrow confines of the spectator/text relationship. She emphasises changes in the modes of exhibition, helping us to understand cinema as a lived social experience, rather than a reified act of 'reading'. And in doing so, situates the reception of films within a broader public sphere of cinematic discourse.

As Hansen puts it, her project is "to delineate the contours of female subjectivity, with all its contradictions and complicity, in the institution of cinema and the text of film history."[163] And in order to do so she, like Staiger, places her textual analysis in the context of the public discourse that surrounded Valentino early in the twentieth century. Drawing on a number of resources, from the film texts themselves, to reviews, interviews, studio publicity, articles in fan magazines and the general press, as well as popular biographies, Hansen demonstrates how these sources at once document, manipulate and constitute the reception of Valentino's films.

What Hansen shows us, is how the cinematic subject of representation, as well as the cinematic spectator is constituted by the social discourses of cinema. Moreover, she demonstrates that a consideration of the filmic text, a concern for the formation of the cinematic apparatus, and reflection on the social and historical constitution of cinematic reception are not mutually exclusive enterprises. So while, neither Hansen nor Staiger concern themselves with the physicality of the spectator, they share an enterprise which is focussed on the cinematic experience and the various ways in which that experience is constituted. As a result, the contribution of this form of reception studies to the debate about the embodiment of the cinematic subject lies less in their consideration of the place of the body within cinema and more in the

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[163] Hansen, (1991), 253

methodology that is used to discern the contours of socio-historical spectatorship.

Technologies of the Self

How then are we to account for subjectivity in contemporary cinema? And further, how are we to conceive of the role of the body within it? As we have already seen, theories of the apparatus focus on the presumed interaction between spectators, texts and technology. They examine the material conditions of the film viewing, the technology involved in the viewing process, the way in which the text itself has been constructed, and of course, the 'mental machinery' of the viewer. Cinema is seen as a 'social machine', leading theorists to investigate not only the physical machinery of cinematic technologies but the "demands, desires, fantasies, speculations (in the two senses of commerce and the imaginary)"[164] involved in the cinematic encounter.

In their analyses of the material conditions of cinema, writers such as Baudry, Metz and Mulvey showed that the spectator was positioned by cinema in very specific ways. They argued that the cinema did not offer a 'value-free' reflection of reality, but that it was a thoroughly constructed experience. They showed that while cinema purported to show the unfettered and unvarnished 'truth' of life, cinema actually worked to 'naturalise' their conditions of existence, and as such, they concluded that cinema was a key ideological mechanism. Moreover, while the spectator may have felt as though s/he was the source of meaning, the active interpreter of meaning within the film, Mulvey in particular showed that cinema often allowed for only a limited set of interpretive positions within the text, and that these positions often forced the spectator to collude with an ideology that oppressed them.

These theories of spectatorship have already been well criticized for their universalism and, particularly with respect to gender, their essentialism. The ideological machinery of cinema, according to these theories leaves little or no room for resistance, for refusal, or for competing visions of 'reality'. It is

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[164] Comolli, (1985), 122

presented as, what Constance Penley would describe as a 'bachelor machine',[165] a perfect ideological assemblage, it never breaks down, it is not subject to sabotage, it effects are always total, and are always totally successful. Such a concept, as Penley suggests, is not only counterproductive to those with a political interest in dismantling the ideology that underpins cinematic texts, but is also neglects the very real, everyday acts of resistance and refusal that occur within culture.   If the effects of cinema were always total it is not simply differing ideological interpretations that would disappear, but the entire industry of cinema would change. A 'perfected machine' would dispense with the need for technological development. Box office flops would be unheard of, as spectators would be unable to resist their positioning by any given film, and arguments about 'intention' or 'meaning' among both high theorists and lay viewers would simply never occur.

Cinema then, is not a 'perfect machine' in either theory or practice. But nevertheless we cannot deny its influence over contemporary culture. It is a massive global industry, and a key institution within our cultural landscape, and this, I think, is the central insight of theorists of the apparatus. The recognition that cinema is an institution, that does not simply reflect, but actively shapes our culture. That it is a vast economic, technical and ideological institution that not only inflects our understanding of the world around us, but actively shapes spectatorial subjectivity.

The central problem with classical film theory's approach to the apparatus however is in its singular focus on the theoretical relations between the spectator and the text, effectively ignoring the possibility that the text is just one of a range of potentially conflicting cinematic discourses that work to produce spectatorship. It is here that the work of reception studies proves to be instructive. As we have seen, scholars like Miriam Hansen and Janet Staiger look at the way in which codes and conventions within the text, as well as the wider discourses, institutional arrangements and modes of delivery, not only shape the social and historical reception of a film, but also work to constitute dominant forms of spectatorial relations in any given era. Their work helps us to understand spectatorship as a highly mutable cultural activity. But further, as Staiger takes pains to point out:

> Every period in history (and likely every place) witnesses
> several modes of cinematic address, several modes of
> exhibition, and several modes of reception. Moreover, any

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[165] Constance Penley, 'Feminism, Film Theory and the Bachelor Machines', in *M/F*, No 10, 1985

individual viewer may engage *even within the same theatregoing experience* in these various modes of reception…[no] viewer is always one kind of spectator.[166]

Any account of the apparatus must therefore be able to accommodate the possibility of failure, of resistance, and of multiple, often conflicting, forms of expression and reception. In this respect it is fruitful to move away from the metapsychological model of the apparatus, bound as it is to a singular, universalistic model of the spectator, and adopt a more Foucaultian paradigm. For Foucault, the apparatus was:

> A thoroughly heterogenous set consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral, and philanthropic propositions…The apparatus itself is a network that can be established between these elements...a set of strategies of the relations of forces supporting, and supported by, certain types of knowledge.[167]

Applying this notion of the apparatus to cinema is of course, not without its difficulties, particularly as Foucault saw this apparatus as a network of power that was mobilised in order to address a perceived social problem. It is the arrangement of heterogenous forms of knowledge that are assembled as a matter of urgency in order to provide a strategic 'solution' to this perceived threat to the social order.

So why should we pursue such an approach? Firstly, this view of the apparatus allows us to move beyond a homogenous concept of ideology. In this view, cultural values are neither singular and nor are they simply imposed upon society by a select group of people. Rather, they arise from a number of competing, and often conflicting discourses, and are negotiated within the context of even the most intimate of relationships. But perhaps the most crucial aspect of this Foucaultian view of the apparatus is that it expressly acknowledges that where there is power, there is also resistance. And that "these points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network."[168] Cinema, and the discourses that surround it are not the totalising or deterministic force that metapsychology might have us believe.

Further, Foucault's notion of the apparatus does not depend on a universalistic or essentialist notion of the psyche. Indeed, for Foucault psychoanalysis is an apparatus of power in its own right. For Foucault, rather

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[166] Staiger, (2000), 21
[167] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1980), 194
[168] Foucault, (1990), 95

than helping us to get at the 'truth' of the individual, psychoanalysis is, at least in part, responsible for the creation of modern subjectivity. Foucault's concern therefore, turns to the human body, or more precisely, to the use of disciplinary practices in the production of the 'docile body'. Foucault suggests that in the eighteenth century there was a proliferation of 'projects of docility', that acted upon the body:

> What was then being formed was a policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behaviour. The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it. A 'political anatomy', which was also a 'mechanics of power', was being born; it defined how one may have a hold over others' bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes[169]

Bodies then, are not 'natural' entities, they are objects that are both 'coerced' and 'manipulated'. The body is an object that is thoroughly invested with power. Power may work to control the body, but this power is not simply repressive. Rather, its effects are highly productive. In his view, these "deployments of power are directly connected to the body", but they do not simply regulate anatomical functions and physiological processes, they also generate "sensations, and pleasures".[170] Indeed he argues that in the nineteenth century, the explosion of discourses of sexuality allowed bodies to be invested with sensational potential; areas were intensified and surfaces were electrified by power.[171] In many ways, Foucault suggests that history has created what Deleuze might call a 'body without organs',[172] an empty, hollow sphere, a site of pure potential, subject to a constantly shifting arrangement of potential intensities.

In Foucault's view then, 'experience' is not simply a matter of apprehending external objects through our senses, and nor, as audience and reception studies might suggest, is it only mediated by the individuals' social identity. Rather, forms of experience are highly socio-historically specific. Experience, therefore, is always implicated in and produced by various knowledges and social practices. It is gained in relation to the external world, and shaped by the world in which it is gained. This concept of 'lived experience' is not outside social, political, historical and cultural forces. Experience is

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[169] Foucault, (1984), 182
[170] Foucault, (1990), 151
[171] Foucault, (1990), 44
[172] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, (London: Mansell, 2000)

differentially gained, and embodiment differentially formed according to the culture in which one finds oneself. And within culture, the formation of experience and the arrangement of the human body, indeed one's very experience of one's own body, will vary:

> Differences between bodies, not only at the level of experience and subjectivity but also at the level of practical and physical capacities, enjoy considerable social and historical variation. Processes and activities that seem impossible for a body to undertake at some times in some cultures are readily possible in others. What are regarded as purely fixed and unchangeable elements of facticity, biologically given factors, are amenable to wide historical vicissitudes and transformations.[173]

For Foucault, experience has a history, and as his work on sexuality and mental illness demonstrate particular kinds of experience have been formed, developed and subsequently transformed through regimes of knowledge and power. In *The History of Sexuality* in particular, Foucault sought to:

> Undertake a history in which sexuality would not be conceived as a general type of behaviour whose particular elements might vary according to demographic, economic, social, or ideological conditions, any more than it would be seen as a collection of (scientific, religious, moral) representations which, though diverse and changeable, are joined to an invariant reality.[174]

Instead he showed that sexuality was a historically singular form of experience, and that the discursive formation of this particular kind of experience was organized as a regime of power and knowledge, that is, as a domain of knowledge, a type of normativity and a mode of relation to the self. His task then:

> To decipher how, in Western societies, a complex experience is constituted from and around certain forms of behaviour: an experience which conjoins a field of study (*connaissance*) (with its own concepts, theories, diverse disciplines), a collection of rules (which differentiate the permissible from the forbidden, natural from monstrous, normal from pathological, what is decent from what is not, etc.), a mode of relation between the individual and himself (which enables him to recognise himself as a sexual subject amid others).[175]

Sexuality, for example, was obviously constituted as a field of study, and was strictly governed by rules of normative acceptability, but for Foucault, what made

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[173] Grosz, (1994), 190
[174] Michel Foucault, 'Preface to the History of Sexuality, Volume II', in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow, (London: Penguin, 1984), 333
[175] Foucault (1984), 333-4

sexuality such an interesting area of study was the relative weight of importance that 'relations to the self' played in the constitution of this kind of experience. Freudian psychology in particular, saw sexuality as being absolutely central to the constitution of the self, and so the experience of both sex and desire become central not only to the subject's social identity, but to their understanding of who they are. Under this domain of knowledge, sexuality moved from being a set of behaviours that an individual may or may not engage in, to an ontological category. Under this regime, sexual desire takes on more significance than sexual acts, and the subject's experience of their desires may be understood less as a bodily demand for satisfaction, than the basis of a way of life.

Mental illness, on the other hand, was constituted, in the main, as a domain of knowledge. It delineated its object of study through a series of "statements that named it, divided it up, described it, explained it, traced its developments, indicated its various correlations, [and] judged it".[176] The effect of these particular institutional systems of discourse and relations of power was to develop techniques for 'governing individuals' and 'guiding their conduct'.[177] Indeed, in differentiating between illness and health, sanity and insanity, normal and abnormal, psychiatry gained governance not only over those suffering mental illness, but over social subjects more generally. For in the process of constituting its object of study, psychiatry also defined its subjects, and through this construction of the parameters of illness and deviancy, it marked out the limits of acceptable, 'normal' behaviour. That is, in both constituting and deploying the category of 'the insane', psychiatry both described 'the sane' and proscribed a set of behaviours that allowed the particular subject to inhabit that realm. In effect, the two categories, like notions of male and female, rich and poor, criminal and law-abiding, were both mutually exclusive and hence mutually constituting, and in gaining a rehabilitative power over one set of subjects, psychiatry gained de facto power over the 'normal' social subject.

The effect of these three axes of power/knowledge then, was to constitute and articulate specific forms of subjectivity. Developments and transformations in these regimes of power do not simply mean tighter juridical control over the individual. The genius of the effective operational power of these regimes in the modern age is that such power is internalised by the

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[176] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse of Language,* (New York: Pantheon, 1972), 32
[177] Foucault, (1984), 337-8

individual. The subject, in effect, internalises 'the law' and actively polices their internal world. Hence shifts in the constitution of the domains of knowledge can actively transform the subject's experience of the world, and actively produce certain kinds of experience.[178] As Agamben puts it:

> Every apparatus implies a process of subjectification, without which it cannot function as an apparatus of governance, but is rather reduced to a mere exercise of violence. On this basis, Foucault has demonstrated how, in a disciplinary society, apparatuses aim to create - through a series of practices, discourses, and bodies of knowledge - docile, yet free, bodies that assume their identity and their "freedom" as subjects.[179]

Foucault's notion of the apparatus therefore, allows us to escape the limitations of traditional 'apparatus theory'. It acknowledges that ideology can only ever be an effect of competing discourses, not an expressive totality that guarantees its own self interests.[180] It helps us to extend our analysis beyond the actual situation of viewing itself, allowing us to consider the wider discourses of cinema that help to both create, manage and police the spectatorial "demands, desires, fantasies and speculations"[181] that underpin the cinematic event, without falling back on a universalistic or essentialist notion of the psyche. And it allows us to explore a much neglected aspect of the cinematic experience: that of the bodily, or the physical sensations that are created and deployed by this mechanism of power.

In addition, Foucault's concept of the apparatus also allows us to identify cinema as a site of struggle. That is, in the contemporary world, cinema is not merely a site of vacuous entertainment, distributed and consumed without thought or intervention. What can and cannot be said within the cinema is thoroughly circumscribed by regulatory practices. What is represented, and representable, within the text is clearly governed by socially and historically specific codes and conventions, but further, these texts are situated within a network of discourses directed towards the treatment of cinema (and media more generally) as a potential social problem. What makes the study of contemporary cinema so compelling however, is that this struggle to demarcate the bounds of acceptability within the cinema occurs at a time of increasing 'liberalisation' of censorship practices.

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[178] See Foucault, (1990)
[179] Giorgio Agamben, "What is an Apparatus?" and Other Essays, translated by David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 19
[180] See Copjec, 'The Anxiety of the Influencing Machine', *October*, No 23, Winter 1982, recounted in Penley, (1985), 47
[181] Comolli, (1985), 122

Contemporary cinema then, as an institution, is a disciplinary practice concerned with the production of 'docile bodies'. That is not to say that viewers cannot or do not resist. I suspect that everyone has had the privilege of sitting in the cinema next to a person who talks through the movie, who throws popcorn at the screen, who jeers, heckles or laughs inappropriately, who refuses to stay in one place, or who simply eats too loudly. The official regulatory practices of the cinema management that run infomercials reminding us not to smoke or to turn off our mobile phones, who send ushers to intervene when behaviour becomes 'intolerable' or truly 'disruptive', work to reinforce a 'proper' (read highly culturally specific) form of spectatorial relations.

Even the practice of refusing entry to an auditorium after a certain point in the film is reached works to reinforce the predominance of the self-contained narrative structure. Cinemas reinforce certain standards of appropriate behaviour and in doing so they strengthen certain forms of engagement with the text. However, the proprietor of the cinema is not necessarily the locus of behavioural regulation. In the cinema, normative rules of behaviour are often paramount. And indeed, the commercial interests of the cinema may well be at odds with public perception of 'appropriate standards of behaviour' within the cinema. In a recent newspaper article by Mark Kermode for example he suggested that "the sound that now echoes around multiplexes is that of the rustling, chewing and slurping of an ever-expanding range of cinema snacks…isn't it time we added 'no eating' to the 'no smoking' and 'no talking' rules?"[182] And he wasn't alone, his diatribe was warmly received and reiterated not only by the editor but by several members of the public, motivated enough to write to *The Observer*[183] about the "appalling manners of picturegoers…even [at] my local arthouse cinema"! The annoyance expressed by these viewers at this relatively minor infraction of a cinephile's sensibilities, highlights the very real public pressure exerted within a cinema to conform to certain, locally defined, standards of behaviour. 'Appalling manners' is a relative term, and what passes as acceptable at a Saturday night showing of a blockbuster at the local multiplex, may not be tolerated at the 'Special Event: Q&A session with the Director' at the NFT.

Moreover, what I want to investigate within this thesis is the creation of a peculiarly modern form of spectatorship, one that is rooted in corporeal subjectivity. What I will seek to show is that contemporary cinema actively

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[182] Mark Kermode, 'Has porn entered mainstream cinema for good?', *The Guardian*, 4th June 2006
[183] 'Observermail', *The Observer*, 2nd June 2006 and 'Your Letters', *The Observer,* 11th June 2006

seeks to engage its audience on a physical level, and further, that audiences actively seek out films that will provide intense physical experiences for pleasure. However, the corporeal address of contemporary cinema is not a 'naturally occurring event'. It does not function automatically. Rather, corporeal spectatorship demands a certain form of engagement from the viewer, which as I will demonstrate, is actively produced by the discourses of cinema. Before entering the cinema, for example, cinema marketing and journalism incite the spectator to prepare, mentally and emotionally, for a certain form of engagement with the text. And as I have just suggested, upon entering the cinema, the spectator is further compelled to engage with the text in a certain (culturally determined) fashion. But further I will demonstrate that these normative codes that exert such pressure on the spectator do not simply refer to the physical environment and behaviour of the spectator. On the contrary, the individual responses of the spectator to the text are also rigidly policed.

Indeed I will argue that the capacity of film to provoke such intense responses, and in particular *physical* responses, from its viewers, can and does become a source of cultural anxiety that provokes calls for regulation and control. While ostensibly this regulation refers to the dissemination of images, what I will seek to show in this thesis is that the discourses of regulation do not limit themselves to filmic texts. Rather, they focus on the spectator and encourage the development of normative models of spectatorship which work not only to differentiate between 'normal' and potentially 'deviant' spectators, but also work to encourage a kind of 'affective literacy' by disseminating knowledge about 'appropriate' responses to particular kinds of images. The regulation of film then, does not simply affect the kinds of images the viewer might encounter at their local cinema but actively assists in the construction of a particular kind of 'cinematic experience'. And through a regime of normativity, acts to delimit the range of 'acceptable' textual responses, and thereby encourage particular forms of engagement with and response to film.

The regulation of contemporary cinema is therefore an exercise in Subjectification, where the individual is free to choose the kind of entertainment s/he desires, at the same time s/he becomes ethically responsible both for the choices s/he makes, and for her or his responses to them. As such, the regulation of cinema can be seen as a process of 'governmentality'. For Foucault, the notion of government is not restricted to the exercise of power by the state. "Government also signified problems of self-control, guidance for the family and for children, management of the household, directing the soul, and so

forth. For this reason, Foucault defines government as conduct, or, more precisely, as 'the conduct of conduct'"[184] In this respect, governmentality also describes the operation of power on the autonomous and 'free' subject, who is compelled to govern him or herself. So while, "the autonomous subjectivity of the modern self may seem the antithesis of political power…Foucault's argument suggests an exploration of the ways in which this autonomization of the self is itself a central feature of contemporary governmentality."[185] In a liberal state therefore government is intrinsically linked with what Nikolas Rose calls "the practice of freedom",[186] where the individual must identify him or herself as a free subject who is responsible for their choices and actions within society. "Thus, in a very significant sense, it has become possible to govern without governing *society* – to govern through the 'responsibilized' and 'educated' anxieties and aspirations of individuals and their families."[187]

On the one hand then, with regard to the regulation of cinema, it is very clear that 'the family' is the central locus for contemporary regulation. The steady movement away from censorship of cinematic texts, and toward the provision of 'age classifications' and 'parental guidance', is a clear example of the way in which parents have taken on greater responsibility for the control of their children's viewing. This control however, is accompanied by a demand that parents act in a 'socially responsible' manner. The very real public pressure for parents to regulate their children's viewing, particularly of films aimed at an adult audience can be readily seen in the rhetoric that surrounded the 'video nasties' in the 1980s, which explicitly linked children's viewing of violent films with the kind of 'bad parenting' that comes along with being a member of Britain's 'underclass'[188]. Moreover, this pressure to regulate children's media consumption is regularly reinforced by news reports about child killers compelled to commit their crimes after watching violent films. Parental guidance in this respect can be viewed, not so much as the provision of information, but as a prescription for parental regulation. Or to put it another way, parental guidance supplied by the BBFC might be seen as a way of instilling and using "the self-

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[184] Thomas Lemke, 'Foucault, Governmentality, and Critique', in Rethinking Marxism, 14, No.3, (2002), 50
[185] Rose, (1996), 152
[186] Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 68
[187] Rose, (1999), 88
[188] See Julian Petley, 'Us and Them', in *Ill-Effects: The Media/Violence Debate,* ed. Martin Barker and Julian Petley, (London: Routledge, 2001)

directing propensities of subjects to bring them into alliance with the aspirations of authorities."[189]

This is not to say that acts of censorship have disappeared entirely. Within the UK the BBFC still regularly intervenes in film and video works. Indeed, under the auspices of the Video Recordings Act,[190] brought into effect in the wake of the video nasties debacle, the BBFC has become the statutory body responsible for the regulation of DVDs and videos. And as a result, the Board requests a great deal of cuts, and refuses classifications for works intended for consumption in the home, even when, or perhaps more accurately, particularly when the intended audience is an adult one.[191] Adults are therefore seen to have responsibility for determining their children's access to film material, but this responsibility is strictly delimited by the state. This issue that was made especially stark in a Government Consultation Paper on the regulation of R18 (pornographic) works in 2000. Where "the responsibility given to adults…to take reasonable care to prevent a child from seeing"[192] sexually explicit works was clearly recognised, but nevertheless, the Government mooted the strengthening of the Video Recordings Act to make it an offence to allow or to fail to take reasonable care to prevent a child from viewing such works.

My intention in this thesis however, is not to investigate children's viewing, or the work of the BBFC per se. To do so would require a book length work in itself. Instead I have chosen to focus on adult consumption of film works. Partly because state or institutional intrusion on adult choice is less easily justified by moral campaigners, but more particularly, because in an age where even works that are refused classification in the UK can be bought from distributors in other countries, and/or downloaded from the internet with relative ease, the regulation of film increasingly becomes a matter of individual choice. My intention then, is not only to look at the legislative framework within which certain 'controversial' films are produced and distributed, but to consider how adults come to be self-regulating.

In this respect, I wish to argue that viewing choices made by adults are not entirely free, but rather that this spectatorial conduct has been shaped by the discourses surrounding controversial cinema. In the first instance, we might see adult viewers as being subject to "regulation through desire, consumption and

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[189] Rose, (1996), 160
[190] *Video Recordings Act*, (London: HMSO, 1984/1994/2010)
[191] For further information see, 'Statistics', *BBFC,* http://www.bbfc.co.uk/statistics/, (accessed 15th May 2010)
[192] The Home Office, *Consultation Paper on the Regulation of R18 Videos*, (London: HMSO, 2000)

the market"[193]. That is, the adult viewer's conduct is regulated through a regime of choice:

> The modern self is institutionally required to construct a life through the exercise of choice…every choice we make is an emblem of our identity, a mark of our individuality, each is a message to ourselves and others as to the sort of person we are…Individuals are expected to…account for their lives in terms of the reasons for those choices.[194]

The cinematic subject then, must account for his or her choices, and must justify those decisions in terms of the motives and pleasures of viewing. And as we will see the demand for justification becomes very pressing when we consider films featuring extreme violence, and especially sexual violence. In this case the consumption of such films becomes a very public question of individual health and personal morality.

The choice to view therefore takes place within a discursive context that identifies such films as a threat to the social body. Such films are perceived to be hazardous to the psychological health of the individual, and the decision to view is framed as a moral choice. In this respect, the governing of free and autonomous individuals requires that those individuals are persuaded to regulate themselves. Viewers of these highly problematic films are therefore "addressed on the assumption that they *want to be healthy*, and [they are] enjoined to freely seek out ways of living most likely to promote their health"[195]. And further, they are "urged and incited to become ethical beings, beings who define and regulate themselves according to a moral code."[196] The individual is therefore conceived as "an autonomous individual capable of monitoring and regulating…their own conduct"[197]. But more importantly, this "notion of government extends to cover the way in which an individual questions his or her own conduct (or *problematizes* it) so that he or she may be better able to govern it."[198]

As I will seek to show, this question of health and morality does not simply apply to the decision to view problematic films. But rather, it also extends to the spectator's relations with and responses to the events occurring on screen. In this very real sense therefore, the spectator is constituted through the

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[193] Rose, (1999), 87

[194] Nikolas Rose, *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self,* (London: Free Association Books, 1989), 231

[195] Rose, (1999), 86-87

[196] Rose, (1989), 245

[197] Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society,* (London: Sage, 1999), 12

[198] Dean, (1999), 12

discourses that circulate around cinema as much, if not more so, than through the texts of the films themselves. Moreover, as I will show in this thesis, these discourses are not only produced and distributed by 'experts', they are actively produced by viewers themselves on film databases, review sites, and discussion forums. Such sites are perhaps far removed from the therapeutic spaces identified by Nikolas Rose, like the analyst's couch or the circle of chairs in the therapeutic group, nevertheless, what is at stake in these discussion sites is:

> The production of the self itself, as a terrain upon which our relations with one another and with our bodies, habits, propensities, and pleasures is to be understood…[These sites] constitute the subject as one responsible to its self because it is responsible to others, incorporating each person, apparently equally, into a democratic field of confession and judgement by all.[199]

That is not to say that viewers do not resist these enjoinders to self-regulation and the formation of 'appropriate' responses to the screen. However, what I will seek to demonstrate is that participants in these public discussions, whether they are compliant or resistant, produce themselves as subjects of a discourse that defines their activities as highly problematic, and potentially deviant.

My task in this thesis then will be threefold. First I will seek to trace the historical roots of spectatorship, in order to show how this highly socially and historically specific relation to the screen came to be produced through the diverse apparatus of cinema. Here I will draw on a number of discussions of early cinema, in order to demonstrate that spectator/text relations are neither a natural, nor an inevitable product of technologies, but the result of a network of discursive relations that held sway over the development of cinema as a particular mode of consumption. Secondly, I want to address the particular changes in spectatorship that are taking place within contemporary cinema. Here I will focus in particular on the breakdown of classical narrative cinema as the dominant mode of expression, and the proliferation of the high concept film. This shift, I will suggest, allows us to pay particular attention the way in which the spectator is addressed as a corporeal, rather than a metapsychological subject, both within the cinema, and in the discourses that surround these films. And finally, I want to engage with the cultural anxiety that surrounds particular controversial films. In this latter case, I will look at the legal framework for the regulation of film, before moving on to discuss the regime of governmentality that surrounds contemporary film regulation.

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[199] Rose, (1996), 249-250

Disciplining the Masses:

Constituting the Modern Spectator

As Daniel Czitrom puts it in his article on the politics of early cinema in New York, "The movies were born in the city"[200]. At the very moment of cinema's inception it took its place among a plethora of popular urban entertainments. It was an industry born into a set of controversies that surrounded not only the contemporary visual culture, but the very specific problems associated with increasing urbanisation in both America and Europe. In the US, the urban population had quadrupled between 1870 and 1910,[201] while in London alone the population had grown from three to six million between 1851 and 1901.[202] Such rapid expansion brought with it a number of social and environmental problems. Turn-of-the-century newspapers were replete with stories about the particular dangers of the new urban landscape, while cartoonists emphasised the horrors, the dangers and the dehumanising influence of living in such a densely populated area,[203] and cultural commentators cited the ever more sensational popular entertainments as both

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[200] Daniel Czitrom, 'The Politics of Performance: From Theatre Licensing to Movie Censorship in Turn-of-the-Century New York', in *American Quarterly* Vol.44, no.4, (Dec 1992), 525
[201] Ben Singer, 'Modernity, Hyperstimulus, and the Rise of Popular Sensationalism', in *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life,* ed. Leo Charney and Vanessa R. Schwartz, (London, University of California Press: 1995), 73
[202] Michael R. Booth, *Theatre in the Victorian Age*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 3
[203] Ben Singer (1995), see in particular illustrations on p.76-77

evidence of moral decline and the likely cause of increasing crime within the city. As a product of both the Victorian culture of spectacle and a modern urban leisure pursuit cinema was inevitably drawn into arguments about these contemporary social problems, and as cinema's popularity increased it came to be seen as a significant source of these social problems.

Within the popular imagination, the physical dangers of living in a densely populated city were matched only by the psychological dangers of the newly burgeoning mass culture. As Graham Murdock suggests in 'Reservoirs of Dogma',[204] by the 1850s a familiar pattern of lurid popular fictions, sensationalised newspaper coverage and blood-soaked, spectacular and thrilling entertainments had all found purchase within British culture. Social commentators of the era not only saw this change as a clear symptom of social and moral degeneration but argued that such depictions were likely to incite further instances of immoral and anti-social behaviour. At the root of this fear was the particular way in which the 'mass audience' of these popular entertainments was conceived. The threat posed by the 'masses' was verbalised by Charles Mackay in 1841 when he suggested that "Men…go mad in herds, while they only recover their senses slowly, and one by one."[205]

The concept of 'crowd psychology' was popularised by the publication of Gustav Le Bon's influential book *The Crowd* in 1895. For Le Bon, the psychology of the crowd was a simplistic one: by becoming part of an anonymous crowd individuals abandoned personal responsibility and succumbed to the influence of the group. Under the influence of the crowd each individual became an uncultivated 'barbarian' driven by instinct, prey to 'emotional associations' and incapable of exercising any critical faculties.

In Le Bon's view, the will of the crowd could be easily guided. A charismatic leader like Napoleon could be hailed as a hero, even a god, and invite blind submission from his followers. But his ability to lead their actions depended, at least in part, on his ability to sway the emotions of the crowd. And for Le Bon, the most effective way to do this was through the use of images. In his view, "the imagination of crowds…is particularly open to the impressions

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[204] Graham Murdock, 'Reservoirs of Dogma: An archaeology of popular anxieties', in, Barker and Petley, (2001)
[205] Charles Mackay, *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds,* (London: George Harrap, 1956), xx, http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext96/ppdel10.txt (accessed 15th May 2010)

produced by images."[206] Indeed even the "power of words is bound up with the images they evoke".[207] Crowds therefore, could be easy led through the cogent use of both real imagery and evocative speech.

Although *The Crowd* ostensibly presented a dispassionate and objective view of the psychology of the crowd and argued that the effects of the crowd psychology would be felt by any individual, regardless of the particular social and cultural position they inhabited, the politics that underlie his views are clearly evident. *The Crowd* was written in a period that Le Bon saw as the "the era of crowds", an era characterised by the entry of the popular classes into political life. As he saw it these 'masses', particularly in their formation of labour unions, sought nothing less than the complete destruction of society as it existed, preferring to revert back to a "primitive communism".[208] For Le Bon, the formation of a mass culture was nothing short of an omen of an impending class war that had the potential to end 'civilisation' as he saw it. His characterisation of the of the crowd as suggestible, irrational and easily led, therefore appears as little more than an extended metaphor in the service of thinly veiled political rhetoric, based on his fear of the working-classes.

Le Bon's arguments clearly drew on ideas that were already well established by the end of the nineteenth century. Criminology in particular, already tended to characterise crowds by their irrationality and its propensity for criminal behaviour. As Rachel Vorspan points out in her article on the historical transformation of urban leisure,[209] by the middle of the nineteenth century the perceived danger posed by large gatherings of the working-classes had already led both local authorities and the judiciary in the UK to regulate, and in some cases criminalise, urban working-class leisure pursuits. Group entertainments in urban spaces were treated with open hostility by the authorities. Rowdy and undisciplined street games were perceived to be not only immoral, but potentially criminal, and almost inevitably linked to both violence and gambling, and as such were treated as a danger to society. Indeed Vorspan suggests that, "the governing classes feared that even a crowd assembled for recreational purposes might suddenly dissolve into a menacing political mob."[210]

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[206] Gustav Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind,* (Project Gutenberg, February 1996), http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/gutbook/lookup?num=445, (accessed 15th May 2010), Chapter 2
[207] Le Bon, (1996), Chapter 2
[208] Le Bon (1996), Introduction
[209] Rachel Vorspan, '"Rational Recreation" and the Law: The Transformation of Popular Urban Leisure in Victorian England', in *McGill Law Journal*, 45, No 4 (2000)
[210] Vorspan, (2000), 900

Eradicating street crowds became one of the judiciary's highest priorities. The new policy of fostering a 'rational recreation' for the urban masses took two routes according to Vorspan. The first was in the creation of 'new' municipal police forces "who would discipline urban life by dispersing and arresting people who gathered in thoroughfares".[211] The police forces kept close surveillance of working class areas in an attempt to enforce acceptable standards of public behaviour. But this more general concern with public order, gave way to a specific concern with boisterous working-class leisure pursuits as police action specifically targeted street sports, popular festivals and itinerant musical entertainment.

This dissolution of the street entertainment was complemented by a second judicial policy to foster more regulated and therefore disciplined forms of urban leisure. Worries about the health of the working-classes, and fear that disease would incite political unrest, led both the government and the judiciary to seek appropriate alternative urban spaces where the working-classes could participate in more 'rational' and disciplined forms of physical exercise.[212] Urban walks, parks, playgrounds, and sports fields, alongside the promotion of athleticism were seen to be the key to improving both public health and working class morality.[213] In essence, British courts pursued a policy of spatial segregation. By the turn of the century, the popular right to recreation in a public place had been repealed. [214]

Similarly, the courts attempted to 'rationalise' indoor mass entertainments. A series of statutes in the nineteenth century served to introduce controls on commercial entertainments on both a local and a national level. Local authorities were given leave to apply their own licensing schemes on public houses, music halls and theatre, and eventually cinema. The courts upheld magistrates' right to apply moral criteria in their decisions to grant licenses to applicants. And in the enforcement of both legislation and regulatory decisions, the courts often took into account the relative 'respectability' of the establishment. As such, courts dealt with public houses relatively severely, while theatres, which by the middle of the nineteenth century were a popular middle class leisure pursuit, were shown a leniency that sought to foster both their establishment and development.[215]

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[211] Vorspan, (2000), 901
[212] Vorspan, (2000), 913
[213] Vorspan, (2000), 914
[214] Vorspan, (2000), 935
[215] Vorspan, (2000), 935

During the nineteenth century then, the leisure pursuits of the urban working-classes, underwent a remarkable transformation. The mass participation in what Vorspan terms 'pre-industrial soccer', characterised by the sheer number of "unrestrained people [who] took possession of the streets",[216] gave way to a more 'civilised', more disciplined, mass spectatorship. The rowdy, brutal and disorganised crowd, that provoked such fear among the governing classes, had been dissipated in favour of 'respectable' activities and entertainments that took place in thoroughly regulated and intensely monitored urban spaces. Although, as we will see, these indoor mass entertainments were not considered to be wholly respectable, especially those associated with the working-classes.

Le Bon's arguments were influential, partly because the book drew on these 'respectable', middle-class fears and anxieties that surrounded the growth of the urban working classes, but also because his ideas resonated with the cultural shift towards a more visually-oriented popular culture. Building on these fears Le Bon suggests:

> Nothing has a greater effect on the imagination of crowds of every category than theatrical representations. The entire audience experiences at the same time the same emotions…[and sometimes] the sentiments suggested by the images are so strong that they tend, like habitual suggestions, to transform themselves into acts.[217]

At this time of course, the connection between working class theatre and juvenile crime was already perceived to be well established. What is notable about his arguments however, is the way in which his conception of the crowd clearly prefigures debates about the psychology of the spectator in the 1970s:

> The images evoked in their mind… are almost as lifelike as the reality. Crowds are to some extent in the position of the sleeper whose reason, suspended for the time being, allows the arousing in his mind of images of extreme intensity which would quickly be dissipated could they be submitted to the action of reflection.[218]

Le Bon's analogy between the sleeper and the spectator is not developed. And of course, we must be mindful of the fact that he is not actually talking directly about a mass audience, but crowds more generally. Nevertheless, Le Bon's ideas about the appeal of images to the unconscious mind, and their capacity to produce ideological effects, is clearly a precursor to later notions of spectator-

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[216] Vorspan, (2000), 905
[217] Le Bon, (1996), Chapter 3
[218] Le Bon, (1996), Chapter 3

text relations, demonstrating perhaps, just how thoroughly his study is implicated in the rapidly expanding visual culture of the late nineteenth century.

Constituting Spectatorship

In nineteenth century Britain then, popular urban leisure underwent a radical transformation. Supported by the efforts of the judiciary, authorities succeeded in bringing boisterous, mass street entertainments to an end, and fostered more 'rational', disciplined, morally respectable, and physically segregated pastimes.[219] The unruly and aggressive games of street football that invited the participation of large crowds, for example, were vigorously policed and prosecuted, while local authorities sequestered discrete urban spaces in order to encourage more 'desirable' forms of sport such as amateur athleticism. Similarly, regulatory bodies like the Football Association and the Amateur Athletics Club were set up, not only to establish rules, but to encourage discipline among the participants. This regulation of sporting activities, particularly in the case of football, which demanded just 22 players on the field at any given time, brought mass participation in matches to an end, and encouraged a different form of engagement with the game, in the form of mass spectatorship.

As Rachel Vorspan persuasively argues, the nineteenth century courts played a crucial role in "demarcating English (*sic*) cultural life into a series of physically discrete and morally ordered spaces."[220] But what I want to suggest is that it is through this control of space, that the juridico-political system seized control of the working-class body at leisure. As we have already seen, newly established police forces explicitly monitored working-class areas in order to enforce 'correct' standards of public behavior, and this surveillance of unregulated street sports and entertainments was complemented by a drive towards greater regulation and the fostering of disciplinary practices and techniques within more 'desirable' forms of leisure.

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[219] See Vorspan, (2000)
[220] Vorspan, (2000), 891

The impetus for the development of both designated urban recreational ground and regulated sport was, of course, motivated by a fear of ill-health and disease, but this was more than a fear of contagion. Ill-health among the working classes might mean lower productivity, an increase in the likelihood of political unrest, and a potential threat to national security if British citizens proved to be unfit for military service.[221] As such, during the course of the nineteenth century the working-classes clearly became bound up in a form of *bio-politics,*[222] and *bio-power* was exerted at the level of everyday leisure. In the pursuit of regulated sport, the body was clearly subjected to disciplinary practices. As Foucault would have it, regulated physical leisure engaged in an 'anatomo-politics of the human body', which concerned itself with "the body as a machine: its disciplining, the optimization of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase in its usefulness and its docility".[223] This conflict over urban space that took place in both the British courts and on city streets was only part of a larger socio-historical shift that concerned itself with the both the welfare and the disciplining of the urban working-classes. But for Foucault, this struggle over urban leisure was part of a wider process that was necessary "in order for the proletariat to be granted a body and a sexuality…[and] establish a whole technology of control which made it possible to keep that body and sexuality, finally conceded to them, under surveillance".[224]

The application of juridical power and disciplinary techniques over urban working-class leisure did more than simply produce athletic bodies of course, as the transformation of football demonstrates, the constitution of more 'rational' forms of leisure contributed to a different form of engagement with entertainment forms. That is, the deployment of disciplinary practices within the arena of urban leisure did not simply prohibit street entertainments, but actively produced modern mass spectatorship. That is not to suggest that some form of 'spectatorship' did not exist prior to the middle of the nineteenth century, clearly theatre predates this period by several hundred years. Rather as Richard Butsch argues in his book *The Making of American Audiences*,[225] from the middle of the nineteenth century there is a pronounced shift from active to passive forms of engagement within American Theatre. As Butsch suggests the very concept of 'the audience' is culturally contingent, and what audiences are

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[221] Vorspan, (2000), 913
[222] See Foucault, (1990), 139-145
[223] Foucault, (1990), 139
[224] Foucault, (1990), 126
[225] Richard Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences: From Stage to Television, 1750-1990,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000)

expected to do within a theatre is subject to change. In the eighteenth century, for example, it would have violated social order for aristocratic audiences to maintain silence and pay attention to the actors, since actors held a lower social station, and such an act would be construed as an inappropriate act of deference.   As late as 1830 it was common practice for members of the audience to sit on the front of a box, turning their back on the stage, in order to create a circle for conversation.[226] Indeed, as one visitor to a theatre in Philadelphia in the 1830s notes, the young men of the audience "paid not the slightest attention to the stage, but walked about, drank together, and argued as if nothing else were going on."[227]

As Butsch suggests, until the middle of the nineteenth century the predominantly male audiences were expected to be very active within the theatre. For the upper-classes, attendance was as much about being seen, socialising with one's associates and fraternising with prostitutes as it was about the play, and it was not uncommon for privileged young men to take the opportunity to parade their finery on the stage during a performance.[228] This activity was understood by the audience, by the theatre managers and by the players as a fundamental right of the audience. The working-classes in particular, exerted ownership over their theatrical experience, expressing their delight and dismay in equal measure: hissing and booing, throwing things at the stage, calling out for songs, chastising the performers and even physical assault. Indeed, Butsch suggests that audiences of all levels were not above rioting to enforce their will.[229]

Of course rioting, physical assault and throwing things at the stage were not exactly desirable. Theatre managers often published requests that audiences should refrain from throwing things during performances on their playbills. But nevertheless, such activity was treated as a self-evident right of the audience; a "conception…rooted in a European tradition of audience sovereignty that recognised audiences' rights to control the performance."[230] By the 1840s however, this kind of behaviour came to be pejoratively labelled as 'rowdy', and was perceived less as the audience exercising their rights, and associated more the 'poor manners' of the lower-classes. Such behaviour not only contravened newly established middle-class codes of propriety but came to

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[226] Richard Butsch, 'Bowery B'Hoys and Matinee Ladies: The Re-Gendering of Nineteenth Century American Theatre Audiences', in *American Quarterly* 46, no.3, (Sept 1994), 379
[227] Alexis de Tocqueville, quoted in Butsch, (1994), 379
[228] Butsch, (2000), 23
[229] Butsch, (2000), especially Chapter 1
[230] Butsch, (2000), 3

be seen as a working-class menace, as all too "easily such collective power might be applied to larger economic and political purposes".[231]

Over the course of the 1840s, standards of behaviour within middle-class theatres had shifted so radically that by 1849 the theatre managers' appeals to prevent the throwing of objects at the performers had been replaced by a request that "'fidgety individuals' not stand and put on coats early as 'it is most distressing to the ladies and gentlemen on stage' and 'to respect the feelings of those who wish to see the whole play in quiet'".[232] Taming the audience was a challenge for the theatre manager. Structural strategies, such as replacing moveable benches with individual chairs that were bolted to the floor facing the stage and dimming the house lights, were complemented by social strategies: prostitutes were barred from entry, theatres became segregated along class lines, there was an insistence on the proper deportment of the clientele, and more middle-class women were encouraged to attend, in order to provide a 'civilising influence'. That is, theatre managers began to insist on 'manners' and 'decorum' from the middle-classes, as well as enforcing dress codes for the elite.

On the whole, however, this insistence on new standards of conduct, at least from the middle and upper classes, was facilitated by a cultural shift in middle-class culture in the 1830s and 1840s. A new concern for 'respectability' pervaded all aspects of daily life, and a sharp distinction was drawn between what was 'respectable' and what was 'disreputable'. This binary opposition created norms of behaviour that were fractured along class lines. Class status was to be gained in the exercising of manners, of observing etiquette, and in acting in accordance with strict rules of behaviour, while 'respectability' hinged on being seen with the right people in the right places, that is, in avoiding associations with the disreputable working-classes.

Such a concern for respectability was clearly implicated in the segregation of theatres along class lines. In the pursuit of respectability, certain theatres closed their doors to the working-classes, and chose to show "a particular type of drama for a particular class of audience".[233] But for the audience, "attendance at respectable theatres became an occasion for exhibiting the manners, detailed in etiquette manuals, that defined the

[231] Butsch, (2000), 5
[232] quoted in Butsch, (1994), 386
[233] Butsch, (1994), 375

boundaries between respectable and other."[234] Coarseness, rowdiness, boisterous behaviour and emotional outbursts were marked as attributes of the 'disreputable' working-classes, and by contrast, the middle-classes performed their status through self-control and restraint. "Body management called for proper posture and gesture, even control of one's gaze and walk. Spitting was prohibited. Emotional control was also part of this elaborate etiquette. Anger and conflict were to be avoided; even laughter was restrained."[235]

As Butsch points out, such exaggerated restraint soon gave way to the pressures of consumer culture, where indulgence was positively encouraged. Women in particular, indulged in new, more elaborate fashions, which were complemented by gaiety and theatricality in behaviour.[236] But nevertheless the transformation of the notion of appropriate behaviour within the theatre, which occurred during 1830s and 1840s, had left a lasting legacy in the formation of spectatorship. The concept of audience sovereignty had been fundamentally overturned, and strict rules of conduct and response were rigidly enforced by theatre managers, by the audience members themselves, and also, occasionally, by the actors.[237] Moreover, as Butsch himself argues, the quelling of audience expression effectively "privatized audience members' experiences, as each experienced the event psychologically alone, without simultaneously sharing the experience with others."[238] In effect, spectatorship itself had been transformed. Ontologically, the spectator was no longer a casual witness to an event, but a rigidly constructed subject position, characterised as much by its docility as its engagement with the performance. Spectatorship had, in essence, become a disciplinary practice.

The concern of the middle-classes in Britain, like those of America, to both develop and preserve their own 'respectability', led to a decline in middle-class audiences between the 1820s and 1850s, as they sought to distance themselves from associations with the working-classes.[239] The increasing emphasis on differentiation between the classes during this period occurs, not only in the physical separation of theatres catering for the different audiences, but also within social discourses. Within journalistic reviews of the theatre in particular, there is an increasing concern with the differentiation between middle-class and working-class audiences, particularly in terms of their behaviour.

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[234] Butsch, (1994), 375
[235] Butsch, (1994), 385
[236] Butsch, (1994), 390
[237] Butsch, (1994), 396
[238] Butsch, (2000), 15
[239] Booth, (1991), 7

William Hazlitt, for example, writing in the early nineteenth century, built upon the pre-existing dichotomies of 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' theatre. He differentiated between theatre as 'art' and theatre as mere 'leisure'. For Hazlitt, the theatre was a space of potential aesthetic refinement that could bestow social status on its spectators. But such a transformation could only occur firstly, if theatre itself could be dissociated from the escapist pleasures of the working-class leisure, and secondly, if the theatre audience could be persuaded to demonstrate both appropriate behaviour and critical discernment.[240]

Writing about the 'fashionable' audiences of the Covent Garden Opera, Hazlitt suggested that these audiences exercise fastidious restraint by maintaining silence and carefully avoiding touching one another during the performance. However, the audience members who observed such 'polite' behaviour at the Opera, did not necessarily adhere to the same standards within the theatre, and as such, Hazlitt suggested "a system of distinction making indecorous behaviour the subject of severe social sanction".[241] In essence, a system of normative social practice, perhaps even the exercise of the panoptic power of the audience as a whole, where each member is forced to internalise the codes of appropriate spectatorial behaviour and enact them on each visit to the theatre. This spectator is not exactly a subject position produced through interpellation by the text, but a performative activity engaged in by the individual.

The Arrival of Cinema

Like nineteenth century theatre, early cinema was shot through with class divisions. And while, in the US at least, films were shown in a variety of different contexts, catering for a wide range of clientele, from private viewings at society balls and first-class theatres, through to vaudeville houses and nickelodeons,[242] it was the storefront nickelodeon that dominated the public

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[240] Colin Harris, '"Polite Conversation": Performance, Politics, and National Unity in William Hazlitt's Theater Criticism', *Prometheus Unplugged*, third annual national graduate student conference on Romanticism, Emory University, Atlanta, (Apr 1996), http://prometheus.cc.emory.edu/panels/5D/C.Harris.html (accessed 5th Nov 2007)

[241] Harris, (1996)

[242] Russell Merritt, 'Nickelodeon Theatres 1905-1914: Building and Audience for the Movies', in *The Americian Film Industry,* ed. Tino Balio, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976)

image of film exhibition.[243] In the US, the audience of the nickelodeon "was defined as a group by the price of admission"[244] and hence was associated predominantly with working-class and immigrant communities.[245] Similarly, in the UK cinema's early home in the 'penny gaffs' assured its conflation with the lower-classes, fuelling 'respectable fears' about both the morality and the behaviour of early cinema audiences.

As Richard Butsch points out, although descriptions of audience behaviour are few, what is remarkable about them is their resemblance to descriptions of nineteenth century working-class theatre audiences.[246] As Miriam Hansen puts it:

> The neighbourhood character of many nickelodeons – the egalitarian seating, continuous admission, and variety format, nonfilmic activities like illustrated songs, live acts, and occasional amateur nights – fostered a casual, sociable if not boisterous, atmosphere.[247]

The nickelodeon, it would seem, was appropriated by its audience as a public space where "people chat in a friendly manner, children move freely about the house"[248] and "regulars stroll up and down the aisles between acts and visit friends".[249]

Moreover, Butsch suggests, the nickelodeon audience had effectively reasserted its sovereignty over the performance. Within the cinema there was significant interaction between the audience and the theatre staff, and "Managers of small theatres attempted a delicate balance between acquiescing to their audiences' wishes and 'managing' the audience"[250] Films could be edited for the audience's tastes, reels could be run backward or at varying speeds, and musical accompaniments could deviate from provided scripts in order to alter the mood or tone of a film; turning serious dramas into farces. And as a rule managers were supportive of efforts to please the audience

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[243] Richard Butsch, 'The Celluloid Stage: Nickelodeon Audiences' From *The Making of American Audiences: From Stage to Television, 1750-1990,* in *Movies and American Society,* ed. Steven Ross, (London: Blackwell, 2002), 19

[244] William Jay Gaynor, Justice of the Supreme Court of New York, circa 1913, in Nancy J. Rosenbloom, 'From Regulation to Censorship: Film and Political Culture in New York in the Early Twentieth Century', in *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 3, no.4, (October 2004), http://www.historycooperative.org/cgi-bin/justtop.cgi?act=justtop&url=http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/jga/3.4/rosenbloom.html , (accessed 15th May 2010), para 20

[245] Hansen, (1991), 65

[246] Butsch, (2002), 22

[247] Hansen, (1991), 61

[248] Foster, 'Vaudeville and Motion Picture Shows' (1914), 27-8, quoted in Butsch (2002), 22

[249] Lewis Palmer, 'The World in Motion', *Survey* 22 (June 5, 1909), 356, quoted in Butsch (2002), 22

[250] Butsch (2002), 23

"regardless of the impact on the dramatic effects of the movie, and despite [the] objections of movie producers".[251]   As such, working class audiences exerted a degree of control over the use of the cinema space, and over the meaning of film texts. As Butsch argues, the reception activities of these early audiences shaped the reading of early film in order to "fit their own working-class experience, and thus used the nickelodeon as a site for producing alternative culture."[252]

This positive, progressive reading of the activities of working class audiences within early cinema however, was not shared by moral majority of the time, who saw both the clientele and their behaviour as a problem. As Barton Currie points out in 1907, the nickelodeons were seen to be 'haunted' by "undesirables of many kinds", including pickpockets, who "found them splendidly convenient, for the lights were always cut off when the picture machine was focussed on the canvas." [253] Indeed the lack of lighting, ironically introduced within mainstream theatre as a means of subduing the audience and encouraging a more passive spectatorial engagement with the performance, was seen to be at the root of many of the problems of cinema. As the Edinburgh Chief Constable reported in 1917 "the darkness, combined with the low standard of morality of the individual" not only led to crime within the theatre, but opened up the possibility of sexual congress.[254]

The potential for such conditions to lead to 'immorality' and 'indecency' within the theatre was oft repeated on both sides of the Atlantic.[255] And while concern circulated around the potential for young women to be induced into 'improper conduct', anxieties were also frequently expressed about the danger of sexual assaults on children.[256] The problem with cinema performances was "the conditions under which so many are given – the dark room, filled with adults and children, absolutely without supervision, affording no protection against the

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[251] Butsch, (2002), 23
[252] Butsch, (2002), 24
[253] Barton W. Currie, 'The Nickel Madness: The Amazing Spread of a New Kind of Amusement Enterprise Which is Making Fortunes for its Projectors', in *Harper's Weekly,* August 24 1907, http://www.cinemaweb.com/silentfilm/bookshelf/17_hw_1.htm , (accessed 15th May 2010)
[254] Annette Kuhn, *Cinema, Censorship and Sexuality, 1909-1925*, (London: Routledge, 1988), 120
[255] See Butsch, (2002), 28, Kuhn (1988), 120, Czitrom (1992), 547, Robert O. Bartholomew, 'Report of Motion Pictures and of Investigation of Motion Picture Theatres of Clevelend' (1913), in Ross, (2002), 38 and Raymond B. Fosdick, 'Report on Motion Picture Theatres of Greater New York' (1911), http://www.cinemaweb.com/silentfilm/bookshelf/17_fi_3.htm, (accessed 15th May 2010)
[256] Kuhn, (1988), 120

evil-minded and depraved men who frequent such places."[257] Questions about the validity of at least some of these claims notwithstanding, what is clear is that the problem of cinema is twofold. On the one hand, concern centres on the moral character of the audience, while on the other, it is the physical conditions of the theatre, rather than the content of films themselves, that are at issue.

As these examples demonstrate, during these early years of cinema, concerns about health and safety were absolutely central to the rhetoric surrounding film houses, and provided the cornerstone of early cinematic regulation. The crowding together of large numbers of people into small makeshift auditoria led to fears about the spread of epidemics.[258] And early efforts to legislate for this 'new kind of amusement' were prompted, in no small way by the threat of fire posed by the new technology.[259] In the UK, even though the risk of fire was considered to be overstated, in 1909 the Cinematograph Act[260] was passed in an effort "To safeguard the public from the danger which arises from fires at cinematograph entertainments, which are especially liable to outbreaks of fire on account of the long highly inflammable films which are used in the lanterns."[261] The Act required all buildings in which films were to be shown to be licensed under a set of regulations drawn up by the Home Office. The regulations themselves were exclusively concerned with the safety of the buildings. However, responsibility for issuing licenses was passed down to County Councils who were also granted the authority to "determine the conditions under which licenses were granted"[262]; paving the way for the local censorship of a film's content.

Similarly, in New York in 1909 the National Board of Censorship (NBC), under the leadership of Charles Sprague Smith and John Collier dedicated itself to the dual goals of 'uplift' of the industry and the principle of voluntary censorship.[263] Collier in particular, vociferously rejected any legal impetus enforcing the censorship of film, insisting instead on a policy of voluntary submission of films by producers to the board. But while the NBC were clearly focussed on bringing about 'morality' and 'decency' in cinema through

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[257] "Thomas D. Walsh, Superintendent of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, quoted in *New York Times,* 2 Aug 1911. Between 1909-1913 the SPCC prosecuted 114 people in the courts for alleged crimes against children in movie houses." From Czitrom, (1992), 553
[258] Kuhn, (1988), 120 and Rosenbloom, (2004), para 11
[259] See Kuhn, (1988), 16, Czitrom, (1992), 537 and 553, Merritt, (1976), 78 and Vorspan, (2000), 956
[260] *The Cinematograph Act 1909,* (London: HMSO, 1909)
[261] House of Commons debate, Vol.3, cols. 1596-7 (21 Apr. 1909), quoted in Kuhn, (1988), 16
[262] Kuhn, (1988), 17
[263] Rosenbloom, (2004), para 7

censorship, the matter of the physical space of cinema remained central to their concerns. Together with the Mayor's Office, Smith and Collier, like the UK government, sought to change the process of theatre licensing in order to improve the conditions of film exhibition by "finding cleaner, less crowded, and less hazardous exhibition spaces than the current nickelodeons".[264]

The small matter of making cinema 'respectable' of course, would take more than the tightening of safety codes for the theatres. The audience itself would need quelling. Indeed, in a report on 'motion picture theatre' conditions made by Raymond Fosdick for the Mayor's Office in 1911, Fosdick makes pointed reference to the fact that in some theatres, "No attempt was made to maintain order. Quarrels were frequent."[265] While in others, "The crowd was surging back and forth, pushing and shoving for vantage points of view. Quarrels were frequent."[266] The quarrelsome character of the picture-going crowd, it is suggested, is a result of theatre owners' efforts to fill the space to capacity, and the inadequate provision of either seating or ventilation. Nevertheless the report confirms popular conceptions of the 'character' and behaviour of the nickelodeon audience.

The principle of 'uplift' championed by the NBC in the US, that sought to improve not only the conditions of the theatres, but also the 'quality' of the pictures being offered, was also applied to the audience of cinema. Like Vaudeville before it, US cinemas attempted to 'improve' the character of the audience through a number of strategies. Reformers, for their part, attempted to protect the audience from the dangers posed by the darkened theatre by calling for laws requiring the segregation of the sexes[267] and the hiring of "women of good moral character, not under forty," who had "two statements from reputable New York citizens attesting to her character"[268] to supervise children and adolescents in a separate part of the theatre. These efforts however, proved unsuccessful, although, at least in New York, legislators conceded to demands and passed an ordinance requiring theatre owners to turn up the house lights in order to discourage 'immoral' behaviour.[269]

Ultimately, however, it was the theatre owners themselves who worked to improve the character of the audience. The provision of adequate, fixed

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[264] Rosenbloom, (2004), para 8
[265] Fosdick, (1911), section IV
[266] Fosdick, (1911), section IV
[267] Czitrom, (1992), 547
[268] "New York Picture Theater Ordinance Discussed," in *The Moving Picture World*, November 18, 1911. 543-45, quoted in Rosenbloom, (2004), para 17
[269] Fosdick, (1911), section IV

seating of course, may well have helped to subdue at least some of the 'quarrels' highlighted by Fosdick, as well as help to foster a more 'classical' spectatorial orientation to the screen. But it was not just legislative demands that were changing the face of cinema in the US. Commercial pressure from an increasingly competitive market meant that many exhibitors upgraded their theatres in an effort to appeal to more affluent clientele. For while early cinema may have been popularly regarded as a working-class pastime, theatre owners themselves pursued a middle-class market.

Like theatre before it, early cinema in the US courted the patronage of the middle-class woman in order to lend their theatres respectability. In Boston circa 1910, the Theatre Premiere offered free admission to women for pre-noon shows, while others charged half price for women and children at all shows, a practice which spread rapidly to other cities.[270] Luxurious interiors borrowed from department stores, baby photograph competitions, free gifts of teddy bears and perfume, and space for baby carriages were all coupled with "a conscious effort to transform the rowdy space of nickelodeons to polite standards of decorum."[271]

Similarly, certain kinds of workers were "discouraged and occasionally even banned from the movies."[272] In Charlestown and Portsmouth for example, theatres refused admittance to enlisted men, while at the same time offered incentives for Officers to attend. The policy reflected the attitude that "One way to keep trouble out of the theatre is not to admit it in the first place."[273] US trade journals, like *The Moving Picture World* and *Motography* offered advice on how to solicit trade from the middle-classes. They recommended improvements both inside and outside the theatre, as well as setting out the ground rules for attracting a 'mixed house' by: avoiding nationally slanted programmes, eschewing ethnic vaudeville acts, and stopping sing-alongs in foreign languages.[274] The advice was founded, at least in part, by the moral problems posed by live acts themselves. Exclusion of these acts was crucial because of "the tendency of vaudeville to become degraded, and the increased difficulty of regulating the general physical and moral conduct of the show if Vaudeville is

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[270] Merritt, (1976), 73
[271] Lee Grieveson, "'A kind of recreative school for the whole family": making cinema respectable, 1907-09' in *Screen,* 42, no.1, (Spring 2001), 70
[272] Merritt, (1976), 67
[273] *The Moving Picture World,* June 3, 1911, p.1246 and June 10, 1911, p.1321, quoted in Merritt, (1976), 67
[274] Merritt, (1976), 67 and Hansen, (1991), 62

allowed."[275] Nevertheless, it is clear that the impetus to remove these non-filmic activities from the theatres is motivated less by the inherent difficulties of the medium than by a concern to discourage the mass participation of immigrant audiences. The result however, Hansen argues, was not just a change in the audience demographic, but a seismic shift in the perception of film.

As Hansen suggests, in streamlining their shows and reducing all non-filmic activities exhibitors succeeded, at least in part, in encouraging the audience to engage with the film, and promoted the absorption of the viewer within the narrative space.[276] By undermining the episodic, distracted engagement, inherent within the variety format, exhibitors pursued a 'totality of effects', characterised by the prolonged attention and absorption of the spectator. This effort was underscored by the revival of the on-stage film lecturer within the theatre circa 1908. The lecturer provided a commentary that accompanied the projection of the film, elaborating the narrative and aiding the spectator's "comprehension of, and involvement with, the more complex stories."[277] As such, the role of the lecturer was to quell the activity of the audience, and promote engagement and absorption. As one professional lecturer of the time put it:

> even at its very beginning, those gifted with a little imagination
> and the power of speech will begin to comment, to talk more or
> less excitedly and try to explain and tell their friends or
> neighbours…The gifted lecturer will gather up and *harness* this
> current of expressed thought...the *buzz and idle comment* will
> cease, and he finds himself without an effort the spokesman
> for the particular crowd of human beings that make up his
> audience.[278]

The role of the lecturer then, was not simply to lend an air of legitimacy to cinema, or to underscore its potential for social and moral 'uplift' through its capacity to educate and inform its audience. Rather, the lecturer was an effective tool in controlling the behaviours of the audience, as well as in contributing to the formation of a classical spectatorial relation to the screen. And indeed it is notable that around 1910 the commonly used term audience was in fact, joined by "the more abstract term 'spectator'".[279]

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[275] National Board of Censorship, *Suggestions for a Model Ordinance for Regulating Motion Picture Theatres,* (New York, 1915), quoted in Czitrom, (1992), 548
[276] Hansen, (1991), 83-4
[277] Tom Gunning, *D.W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film,* (Urbana: University of Illinios Press, 1991), ch4, quoted in Hansen, (1991), 96
[278] W. Stephen Bush, 'The Human Voice as a Factor in the Moving Picture Show", *Moving Picture World*, Jan 23, 1909, 86, quoted in Hansen (1991), 97
[279] Hansen, (1991), 84

In the UK on the other hand, the principle of 'uplift' was not so well received. Reformers who attempted to use cinema as a means to educate the film-going public met with fierce resistance from the newly formed British Board of Film Censors, particularly over issues of morality and sexuality. Films dealing with issues of social purity and hygiene were deemed to be 'propaganda films'; unsuitable for commercial cinema, and hence refused a certificate. In contrast to the NBC in New York, the BBFC defined cinema as "a medium dedicated to the diversion and amusement of the working classes."[280] And while the cinema industry was initially opposed the de facto censorship of these 'propaganda films', this dissent "gave way to an acceptance of the BBFC's line as soon as it became clear that respectability could prove costly for business."[281]

Nevertheless, despite the BBFC's refusal to award certificates to propaganda films, many local authorities made arrangements to show these films in their areas. The problem with these screenings however, was not simply in the depictions of sexuality contained within the film, but that the audience could actively refuse the 'social hygiene' message of the film, and consume it simply as pornography. Here too a lecturer was employed to undermine this most limited of interpretative sovereignty, and undermine 'undesirable' readings by explaining and supplementing the 'important' points of the film.[282]

Despite the differences between the US and the UK, what remains absolutely clear is that on both sides of the Atlantic efforts to improve and regulate early cinema underwent a profound shift in these early years. In both cases, official attempts to bring cinema under the remit of the law were based in the regulation of cinematic space. But concerns about the physical state of the buildings in which films were shown went hand in hand with 'respectable' fears about the working class and immigrant audiences of cinema. But "just as the 'dirty little dumps' had been sanitized, the behaviour typical of neighbourhood audiences – 'the buzz and idle comment', booing and applause, the 'howling of small boys'"[283] was also subdued, and efforts were made by theatre owners to shape an audience of individuals into a homogenous groups of spectators.[284] But as exhibitors accomplished their goals to improve the conditions of the theatre, and domesticate its audience, attention turned towards the effect of the films texts on the viewer.

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[280] Kuhn, (1988), 132
[281] Kuhn, (1988), 132
[282] Kuhn, (1988), 71
[283] Hansen, (1991), 66
[284] Hansen, (1991), 66

Here too the class character of the audience presented problems. On both sides of the Atlantic, the popular appeal of cinema was the precise reason it needed censorship. For the NBC, moving pictures were considered to be "the most important form of cheap amusement in the country, they reach the young, immigrants, family groups, the formative and impressionable section of our cities, as no other form of amusement, and cannot be but vital influences for ill or good."[285] While the BBFC were far more blunt: "The Cinema differs greatly from the Theatre: the audience is less intelligent and educated and includes far more children and young people."[286] Indeed, in 1914, the chairman of the NBC confirmed that the Board's censorship activities only applied to five and ten-cent theatres, allowing legitimate theatres, who catered to the middle-classes to play films (like white slavery films and sex education shorts) that were prohibited in the nickelodeons.

What is clear from the discussion above, is that the activities of both theatre owners, local authorities and censorship boards all contributed to both the formation of classical spectatorship. Cinema here is an institution that sought to orchestrate the activities of viewers, both in order to bring troublesome behaviour under control, and to reinforce certain modes of cinematic consumption. But what is also evident is that this formation takes place within the context of 'respectable' fears, particularly about the working-classes, working-class children, and immigrant communities.

These early discourses of cinema are haunted by these 'Others'; constructed as vulnerable, dangerous, and particularly susceptible to the effects of cinema. Some of these fears have persisted. Children for example, were one of the first targets for control in the cinema, and have remained the locus for regulation to this day, while other groups identified as peculiarly dangerous or vulnerable, like rural communities, or immigrant groups, have been supplanted by more contemporary 'bogeymen', like sex offenders, and as I will demonstrate in a later chapter, young adolescent men more generally. What remains consistent however is that both then as now, the particular groups identified as 'troublesome' "have remained a central target and resource for authorities." And as we will see, "attempts to invent and exercise different types of political rule have been intimately linked to conceptions of the nature of those who are to be ruled."[287]

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[285] Quoted in Fosdick, (1911), section III
[286] Quoted in Kuhn, (1988), 67
[287] Rose, (1996), 152

Conclusion

What all of this seeks to show is that spectatorship is not a 'natural' phenomenon. Rather, spectatorship, as we conceive it in the contemporary world, is more than a peculiar socio-historical construction; it is a continuously monitored and policed disciplinary practice. As I have shown, the juridico-political power that was exerted over forms of leisure in the mid-nineteenth century, sought to foster more 'rational', disciplined forms of entertainment for the working-classes, and demarcate 'respectable' from 'demoralizing' leisure pursuits. This cultural shift was complemented by a similar transformation in middle-class culture. As we have seen, the actions of both local authorities and the judiciary in the UK, in the mid-nineteenth century, worked to impose restrictions on traditional urban leisure pursuits. The action brought to an end the mass participation in street sports and entertainment. Within sport, individuals were offered a choice between participation in the disciplinary practices of athleticism, or a more respectable engagement with sport through mass spectatorship. At the same time, as Vorspan shows, the courts fostered the development of theatre as a more 'respectable' form of leisure. As such, the mid-nineteenth century is a period distinguished by a drive toward more 'disciplined' forms of leisure, which are themselves characterised by an emphasis on spectatorship.

Moreover, during the same period theatres themselves became more regulated and disciplined places, where strict codes of behaviour came to be enforced. In effect, at the same time as there is a greater emphasis on spectatorship as a 'desirable', 'appropriate' and 'moral' form of leisure, the act of spectating itself becomes more thoroughly codified, and subject to both institutional and social opprobrium. As such, spectatorship can be seen to be the end point of social and historical strategies of social control that determine how and where the individual should most appropriately spend their leisure time. The cultural impetus toward spectatorship in the nineteenth century then, not only successfully regulated urban space but helped to shape what Guy Debord

calls the 'society of the spectacle'. The political and judicial policy of pursuing 'rational entertainment' emphasised viewing rather than participation as an appropriate form of leisure. And as we will see in the case of cinema, through a system of licensing of places of entertainment and leisure, these same institutions of legal and political power effectively exerted a continuing pressure that helped to shape the quality of the experience therein.

By the time of cinema's emergence, spectatorship was already a thoroughly codified disciplinary practice. Over the course of the nineteenth century, theatres had become more thoroughly managed and controlled public spaces, designed to subdue interaction and activity amongst the audience members, and promote a more attentive and absorbed relation to the theatrical production. And at least among middle class audiences, models of appropriate behaviour within the theatre were thoroughly codified and internalised, and as a result spectatorship as a 'privatised' and individual psychological relation to the theatrical event became the standard model of 'respectable' theatrical consumption. In short, the nineteenth century preoccupation of the middle-classes to both distinguish and dissociate themselves from the working classes, led to the formation of a unique set of disciplinary practices. These were supported by deeply normative social judgements, and the willing subjectification of the individual theatre-goer, that ultimately produced a peculiarly modern form of subjectivity: the spectator.

This drive toward more disciplined leisure, that effectively increased docility among the working-classes, was compounded by the codification of spectatorial behaviour. The restructuring of theatres and the emphasis on disciplined and orderly behaviour that had occurred within society theatres in the nineteenth century, was not necessarily so rigidly enforced within working-class leisure pursuits such as the cinema. Nevertheless, this emphasis on the conduct of the audience, that determined both the institutional arrangement of lighting, seating etc within the space of theatre, also, eventually, exerted pressure on the behaviour of cinema audiences. As such, spectatorship, or more specifically, theatrical and cinematic spectatorship, can be fruitfully viewed as a disciplinary practice that exerts control over the body of the individual. The act of sitting in a darkened auditorium, in individual seats, silent, motionless and with rapt attention to the performance at hand, was never an inevitable feature of the consumption of either theatre or cinema, but an end point of a series of strategies aimed at both social control and the docility of the individual body.

For film theorists like Metz and Baudry, of course, these features of the social and institutional apparatus are singled out as the preconditions of metapsychological spectator/text relations, but in demonstrating that spectatorship is a disciplinary practice that exerts significant control over the body, we can begin to see how thoroughly the body is bound up in the process of spectatorship. The docility of the body is not simply a precondition for spectatorship, but a normatively defined social practice that is performed by the individual in the process of viewing; a docility that is stringently policed by the institution, but perhaps more importantly, even those activities that are actively condoned by the theatre staff, such as eating and drinking within the auditorium, may still be subject to social sanction by other members of the audience.

Writing of disciplinary practices more generally, and of systems of normativity specifically, Foucault sketches the range of techniques that were used within institutions like the army, the school or even orphanages during their development. He suggests that:

> The workshop, the school, the army were subject to a whole micropenalty of time (lateness, absences, interruptions of tasks), of activity (inattention, negligence, lack of zeal), of behaviour (impoliteness, disobedience), of speech (idle chatter, insolence), of the body ('incorrect' attitudes, irregular gestures, lack of cleanliness), of sexuality (impurity, indecency).[288]

Although Foucault is clearly not talking about social practices within cinema, if we consider this list in the context of the institutional arrangements of many cinemas within Britain, we quickly see how thoroughly policed the cinematic experience is. Entrance to and exit from an auditorium is often rigorously controlled with regard to the start and finishing time of the film, and often no admission will be granted after a certain predetermined point in the movie. Activity, behaviour and speech are subject to a range of techniques that ensure that appropriate standards are adhered to, from the disapproval of other audience members, through the onscreen adverts that tell the audience that one must not smoke, or use a mobile phone, to warnings from staff, and perhaps even eviction from the cinema if the individual refuses to comply. Similarly, the attitudes of the body are monitored and policed. For example, one is expected to sit only in a designated seat, as opposed to the aisle or the proscenium; to occupy just one seat rather than to lie down; to arrange one's body in the seat appropriately, that is, to face front and pay attention, not to put ones feet over

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[288] Foucault (1984), 194

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the chair in front, or to interfere with personal space of other members of the audience etc; to respond to the film appropriately, since even laughing in the 'wrong' places in a film can elicit strong reactions from other members of the audience; and of course, expressions of sexuality within the cinema are rigidly, though not always successfully, policed.

However, this physical and corporeal quality of spectatorship, which is largely ignored by film theory, extends beyond the activity of cinema-going. The docile body of the spectator is a useful body. Not just in the management of cinema business, but in the formal qualities of narrative and spectacular film, in which particular forms of audience engagement are absolutely crucial to the achievement of their effects. Spectatorship is already a disciplined practice, but it is also a productive one. Through observing the disciplinary techniques of spectatorship, one gains access to particular forms of cinematic pleasure that would not necessarily function in a less disciplined environment. Narrative, for example, especially if we are talking about a film like *The Sixth Sense,*[289] which is built on suspense and the twist at the end, absolutely depends on watching the film in a sequence from the beginning to the end, and being able to both see and hear the clues on screen before the final reveal. The deployment of such cinematic effects is facilitated by the disciplinary practices of cinemas; for example, restricting admissions after a certain point in the film, rather than allowing individuals to enter the cinema toward the end and stay through to the repeat showing to catch up on what happened at the beginning. These varied disciplinary practices not only help to create certain cinematic forms, but observance of these disciplinary techniques on the part of the individual is also productive in the sense that it allows her/him to gain access to certain forms of spectatorial pleasure.

Control of the body and its behaviours, through the disciplinary practices of spectatorship is, therefore, central to the development of contemporary cinematic forms, as well as the pursuit of contemporary forms of cinematic pleasure. Indeed, as we will see, contemporary cinema often explicitly addresses the body in its marketing, and promises the viewer intense physical experience while in the cinema. Experiences which are themselves achieved through the institutional and individual management of the spectating body. But if the disciplined body of the spectator is a useful body, it is also a source of considerable concern. Cinema's immediacy and its ability to 'arouse' and to

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[289] *The Sixth Sense,* directed by M. Night Shymalan, (USA: Buena Vista International, 1999)

physically affect the viewer, are seen to be highly problematic, and as we shall see, certain groups are singled out by authorities as particularly vulnerable to such effects. While the particular constitution of these cinematic others has changed over the course of the last century, what remains constant is the idea that cinema is a medium that is capable of bringing about specific undesirable social effects. And in particular, fear can be seen to circulate around the twin figures of the 'vulnerable' and the 'deviant' viewing subject. Or to put it another way, the regulatory discourses of cinema can be fruitfully seen as disciplinary practices that perform normalising judgements and exert normative social pressure over the spectator. And moreover, these discourses particularly concern themselves with monitoring, normalising and ultimately controlling the body and the behaviour of the spectator.

The Promises of Monsters:

Cinema and 'The Experience Economy'

> About two-thirds of the way into *Jurassic Park* (1992), there is
> a scene where Hammond and Sattler talk in the Jurassic Park
> restaurant about the nature of illusion and reality. The scene
> begins, however, with the camera exploring the adjacent gift
> shop. It is a slightly eerie moment, because it is as if the
> movie was at this point turning round and looking at us.[290]

For Thomas Elsaesser, the discomfort he experienced in watching this
scene is rooted in the film's reflexive acknowledgement of its own commodified
nature. That in scanning the gift shop, the film tips a wink to the 'knowing'
spectator about the extensive merchandising that accompanies this particular
film, at the same time as the text itself becomes an advertisement for the
games, gadgets, and toys produced by the film brand. Indeed, in an era where
merchandising, horizontal integration and the search for synergy prevail, it is
doubtful whether we should even talk specifically of 'the film industry'. As
Graeme Turner points out, today, film is only "one of a range of cultural
commodities produced by large multinational conglomerates whose main
interest is more likely to be electronics or petroleum".[291]

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[290] Thomas Elsaesser, 'The Blockbuster: Everything Connects, but Not Everything Goes', in *The End of Cinema As We Know It: American Film in the Nineties,* ed. Jon Lewis, (London: Pluto Press, 2001), 11
[291] Graeme Turner, *Film as Social Practice,* Third Edition, (London: Routledge, 2001), 6

To some extent, cinema has always acted as a vehicle of consumerism. As Charles Eckert's study of early Hollywood demonstrates, as early as 1910, cinema was used to display luxury items, and by 1930 cinema was formally recognised by corporations like Coca-Cola, General Motors and General Electric as a powerful marketing tool, with the potential to stimulate demand for American products on a global scale. The films themselves, in Eckert's view, were often little more than a showcase for fashions, cosmetics, furnishings and luxury goods, and a vehicle for celebrity endorsements and commodity tie-ins.[292] Moreover, endless make-over movies and rags to riches tales demonstrated that identity could be transformed through the purchase of consumer goods. For example, films like *Now Voyager*[293] and *Sabrina Fair*[294] both demonstrated how a well-chosen wardrobe and a few cosmetic treatments could transform a woman into a vision of sophistication, elegance and desirability. The cinema screen was, from the earliest days of Hollywood, the equivalent of a 'display window' replete with luxury goods and aspirational images of glamorous stars, which invited the spectator to purchase and consume; to transform their lives through conspicuous consumption.

However, there is no doubt that the contemporary Hollywood drive towards merchandising has intensified considerably since the first few decades of the twentieth century.[295] In the case of *Jurassic Park* for example, "500 licensees marketed 5,000 products with licensed merchandised sales of $1 billion",[296] figures unknown and possibly undreamt of in the early 1900s. Although as the opening quote from Elsaesser suggests, the film is not unaware of its own status as the centre of a massive merchandising industry. Moreover, as Constance Balides argues, the initial self-referential celebration of its own commercial success quickly gives way to a critique of the rabid commercialisation of the diegetic Jurassic Park experience.[297]

The critique of the diegetic theme park with *Jurassic Park* is doubly reflexive, particularly in view of the fact that the film itself was redeveloped as an attraction at Universal Studios Hollywood, but also in the sense that the film

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[292] Charles Eckert, 'The Carole Lombard in Macy's Window', in Jane Gaines and Charlotte Herzog (eds), *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body,* (London: Routledge, 1990), 104

[293] *Now Voyager*, directed by Irving Rapper, (USA: Warner Brothers Pictures, 1942)

[294] *Sabrina Fair,* directed by Billy Wilder, (USA: Paramount Pictures, 1954)

[295] Justin Wyatt, *High-Concept: Movies and Marketing in Hollywood*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994)

[296] Marcy Mageira, 'Promotional marketer of the year', *Advertising Age,* (21st March 1994), S-8, cited in Constance Balides, 'Jurassic post-Fordism: tall tales of economics in the theme park', *Screen* 41, no.2 (Summer 2000), 139

[297] Balides, (2000), 155

makes extensive use of CGI in order to create an intensely sensational 'movie ride' experience for the viewer, in which the "visceral sense of an amusement park ride becomes part of the attraction for spectators."[298] Coupled with a plethora of intertexts exploring how the special effects were achieved, Hammond and Sattler's discussion of the illusory nature of the Jurassic Park encounter can be seen to draw attention not only to the economic conditions which shape the film's production and reception, but to the very nature of its own technological artifice. This particular mode of address undermines the constitution of an innocent and naïve spectator, helplessly absorbed by the cinematic illusion. But more importantly, the question of whether the spectator actually believes in "a virtual – and realistically impossible – scene, as well as a kinaesthetic effect of dinosaurs hurtling towards her/his position associated with movie rides",[299] is far less interesting than the question of how the intensely visceral experiences associated with many contemporary films are constructed.

Like much of Steven Speilberg's oeuvre, *Jurassic Park* is a clear example of the 'high-concept blockbuster',[300] a style of filmmaking that dominated Hollywood in the 1980s and 1990s, and a business strategy that was designed to pull the Hollywood film industry out of the doldrums. The rise of television in the 1950s and 1960s had led to a sharp decline in cinema attendances, and was compounded by the introduction of the video recorder in the 1970s. If cinema was to survive, the cinema industry had to compete with these new technologies; it had to attract new 'media literate' consumers, brought up on a steady diet of television and popular music. It had to find a means not only of attracting people out of their homes and into the cinema, and of assimilating changing relations between the viewers and texts, but also of overcoming the industry's profound difficulties in identifying a coherent audience to market their products to. Television had stripped classical Hollywood of the family audience, traditionally the one reliable market they could be sure of, while Hollywood's increasingly globalised markets left the film industry with "an audience fragmented beyond any controllable identity."[301]

High-concept filmmaking concentrated on producing striking yet easily reducible narratives and easily identifiable visual styles which, coupled with heavily foregrounded images and music, provided the cinema industry with a

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[298] Balides, (2000), 144
[299] Balides, (2000), 147
[300] Wyatt, (1994)
[301] Timothy Corrigan, *A Cinema Without Walls: Movies and Culture After Vietnam,* (London: Routledge, 1991), 23

powerful new marketing tool, capable of being developed into a succession of global film brands that facilitated not only the primary marketing of the films, but also of the numerous ancillary products. These blockbusters were, in effect, "multi-purpose entertainment machines that breed music videos and soundtrack albums, TV series and video cassettes, video games and theme park rides, novelizations and comic books"[302]

As well as these economic and aesthetic changes, the blockbuster worked to overcome the difficulties presented by an increasingly fragmented and heterogeneous audience, and of the shifting terms of film/viewer relations, by fundamentally changing its mode of address. The high-concept blockbuster distinguished itself from the 'classical narrative film' by abandoning its traditional "unifying strategies of spectator positioning",[303] such as identification or voyeurism, and focused instead on producing films that were "increasingly plot-driven, increasingly visceral, kinetic, fast-paced, increasingly reliant on special effects, increasingly 'fantastic' (and thus apolitical), and increasingly targeted at younger audiences."[304]   Rather than try to homogenize its empirically diverse viewers the Hollywood blockbuster gambled instead on "offering something to everyone, of appealing to diverse interests with a diversity of attractions and multiple levels of textuality."[305]

One of the most significant attractions of course, was an increasing emphasis on the use of spectacle. Although as Geoff King reminds us "spectacle has always been an important part of the equation in Hollywood".[306] The classical narrative film often delivered visual pleasures to its audience: from spectacular *mise-en-scène,* through the spectacles of performance in musicals and comedies, to the very appearance of a star, whose very presence routinely disrupted the narrative coherence of the film. Furthermore, narratives often revolved around scenes of emotional intensity, where the use of fear, horror or 'tear-jerking' devices was central to the film, disrupting the steady progression of the narrative in order to create an emotional experience for the audience. Similarly, the spectacle of action and motion was used routinely within the classical narrative film as a 'thrilling' device. The chase scene, for example, common to many classical narrative films, was as much about the creation of suspense within the spectator and the presentation of spectacular images as it

[302] Thomas Schatz,'The New Hollywood', in *Film Theory Goes to the Movies,* ed. Jim Collins, Hilary Radner and Ava Preacher Collins, (London : Routledge, 1993), 9-10
[303] Hansen, (1997), 135
[304] Schatz, (1993), 23
[305] Hansen, (1997), 135
[306] Geoff King, *New Hollywood Cinema: An Introduction,* (London: IB Tauris, 2002)

is about overcoming obstacles or resolving enigmas, in some cases perhaps even more so.

Nevertheless, within the high-concept film, the 'visual spectacle' gained an increasingly important place. Indeed one might suggest that the presentation of the spectacle has, in many instances, become the *raison d'être* for the blockbuster. This concentration on the spectacle, of course, has done nothing to harm the global dissemination of Hollywood's products, where a simple narrative and relatively sparse dialogue are a positive advantage in a multilingual marketplace. Spectacular sequences need little, if any, translation. But further, Hollywood's emphasis on the production of 'visually spectacular' action and effects-based films also works to reinvigorate cinema as a site of consumption, for while the average narrative film is perhaps more easily and conveniently consumed at home, the impact of the spectacle is significantly ameliorated by its transfer to the 'small screen'. Visual effects demand to be viewed at the cinema, and through the production of these high-impact, visually spectacular films, the Hollywood blockbuster has attempted to reinstate cinema as the *primary* site of its consumption. As one website for a multiplex puts it, "Some films deserve to be seen as the director intended - on the big screen."[307]

This textual strategy is also complemented by the specific institutional arrangements of the multiplex. The multiplex is an institution that has grown alongside the high-concept film, and may even be considered to be an intrinsic part of its apparatus. Certainly in terms of reinvigorating the fortunes of cinema under considerable market pressure, the multiplex has been an invaluable asset. In competing with domestic audio-visual technologies, the multiplex has seemingly adopted two primary strategies. First, it offers viewers 'cinema on demand'. By showing popular films at numerous times throughout the day the multiplex allows the viewer to fit cinema into their own schedule. Secondly, it has sought to distinguish itself from domestic technologies by making use of cinematic technologies like Dolby digital surround sound, high quality projection and larger screens designed to "maximize the corporal, sensory affect of cinema."[308] The multiplex, therefore, with its emphasis on the more corporeal aspects of the cinematic experience provides a perfect partner to the Hollywood blockbuster with its "increasingly visceral [and] kinetic"[309] address.

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[307] 'What's On', *UCI Filmworks*, http://www.thefilmworks.co.uk/index.php?page=dchairdetail, (accessed 15th Oct 2004)
[308] Janet Harbord, *Film Cultures*, (London: Sage, 2002), 52
[309] Schatz, (1993), 23

Moreover, what is implicit in the institutional arrangements of the multiplex is made explicit in the marketing of attractions like IMAX, which announces itself as "the ultimate movie experience"[310], or "the world's most immersive movie experience", capable of "making the audience feel as if they are in the movie".[311] The fact that what was once a special venue attraction is increasing being absorbed into the multiplex, and used to show high-concept, effects-laden Hollywood blockbusters, clearly suggests the centrality of the immersive experience to contemporary cinema exhibition. Contemporary cinema then, sells an experience to its consumer, an experience predicated on its sheer intensity. Indeed, the IMAX Corporation have gone so far as to trademark the phrase 'IMAX Experience', and use it ubiquitously both to market their technologies, and to mark out those films that are shown on IMAX screens, but perhaps more importantly, these technologies attempt to engage us on a physical level.

Both the institutional arrangements of the multiplex and the spectacular displays of the filmic texts conspire to create a mode of address that is profoundly corporeal in its nature: a mode of address that is fundamentally different from the disembodied, illusionistic absorption described by classical metapsychological theory. The prolific use of first-person perspectives that rush through diegetic space, dangle vertiginously over cliff faces and present explosions and objects that threaten to fly into the space of the auditorium, attempts to immerse the viewer in the experience of movement and speed. While digital surround sound provides sound effects powerful enough for us to feel the vibration run through our bodies. Popular contemporary cinema can therefore be seen as a congruent set of texts and technologies, designed to immerse the spectator in an intensely physical experience.

The 'experience' of film however, is not to be considered as an inevitable result of cinema technologies, nor yet wholly determined by the address of the text. As Elsaesser puts it, "film essentially commodifies an experience, which by its very nature is highly subjective and context-dependent".[312] It is my aim in this chapter therefore, to explore the particular ways in which the intensely visceral experience of cinema is produced within contemporary cinema, and to look at the ways in which both the context of viewing, and the subjectivity of the viewer, are disciplined and regulated by a wider cinematic discourse. My contention is

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[310] 'IMAX Cinema', *Glasgow Science Centre,* http://www.glasgowsciencecentre.org/imax.aspx , (accessed 28th May 2010)
[311] 'The IMAX Experience', *IMAX*, http://www.imax.com/ , (accessed 28th May 2010)
[312] Elsaesser, (2001), 15

that cinema, as an institution, should be seen as a site of disciplinary practices, which aim to 'govern' the individual. In this respect the discourses of cinema should be seen as 'technologies of government', which as Nikolas Rose explains, "are those technologies imbued with aspirations for the shaping of conduct in the hope of producing certain desired effects and averting certain undesired events."[313] So while in the next part of this thesis I will look at the particular ways in which the discourse of media effects has been mobilised in both regulatory policies and the popular press in order to shape the adult viewer's relations with socially problematic films, for the moment I want to concentrate on the discourses of film marketing.

From this perspective we can sidestep debates, inspired by the Frankfurt School, over the issue of how the increasing commodification of film might lead to an inevitable denigration of film 'art' and pose serious ideological risks to the passive, and vulnerable mass audience. Indeed, to some degree, this pessimistic view of the audience will be exposed as a discursive construction central to the contemporary regulation of film. Instead, the commercial discourses of contemporary cinema will be treated as part of the wider heterogeneous apparatus of cinema; technologies of governmentality, which attempt to construct particular kinds of relations between viewers and the text. However, this is not to suggest that these discourses, determine spectator-text relations, any more than the text itself. Rather, film marketing should be seen as part of an apparatus directed towards subjectification, where subjectification is understood in the first instance as the "processes of being 'made up' as a subject of a certain type."[314]

What I will aim to demonstrate is that the discourses of marketing on the one hand, and film regulation on the other, construct both the spectator and film in remarkably similar ways. In particular, both suggest that cinema is a site of an intensely arousing physical experience, which has the capacity to produce certain kinds of lasting effects, but where this potential is seen as a desirable, perhaps even necessary feature of contemporary film when it is applied to the high-concept, or mainstream film, the very same capacity that is construed as a problem when dealing with images of violence, and/or sexual violence.

In both of the following chapters, it is my intention to explore the institutional discourses of cinema, discussions of cinema in the popular press, as well as viewers' own reports of their encounters with contemporary film. In

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[313] Rose, (1999), 52
[314] Rose, (1996), 199

this way, I hope to uncover how the corporeal address of cinema is constituted within our culture, the way in which people situate themselves in relation to the visceral thrills of cinema, and perhaps most importantly, how popular discussion itself might become a subjectivising, regulatory force.

Cinema as Experience

As we have already seen, the rise of the multiplex, with its large screen formats and digital sound systems, and the development of extensive merchandising strategies, has gone hand in hand with a shift in textual relations and modes of address. But further, as Janet Harbord argues in her book *Film Cultures,* the multiplex has also relocated cinema within the cultural landscape. That is, the multiplex has relocated the cinema to the shopping mall, where cinema itself is redefined as one commodity among many. Where once cinema was conceived as a specific cultural practice, the multiplex has recontextualised cinema as a site of leisure; a more general and hybrid activity than it once was.[315] And so today going to the cinema is "an activity in which the film is only one of the elements, and maybe sometimes not even the crucial or memorable one."[316]

Moreover, this repositioning of film to a space of consumption means that not only can the cinema screen be seen as a shop window, advertising its own ancillary products, but the film becomes just one of many possible ways of engaging with the brand experience available in the same location. As Harbord puts it, "this signifies an important transformation of both the practice of film-going and the conceptualisation of the film text. If both the activity and the text are less bounded or discrete, the blurring of definitions shifts film culture from object to experience."[317] Indeed Harbord suggests that this transition represents "a more general trend in the organization of production and consumption away from material forms towards the ephemeral, dematerialized experiential

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[315] Harbord, (2002), 48
[316] Elsaesser, (2001), 15
[317] Harbord, (2002), 48

commodity."[318] In other words, contemporary Hollywood aims to provide its consumers with an altogether different 'genre of economic output' to the classical narrative film. It aims to provide the viewer with an *experience*, defined by the intensity of the sensations it can provide.

For Pine and Gilmore, pioneers of the corporate drive towards the creation and selling of the brand experience, cinema is itself the prototypical model of an 'experiential offering'.[319] More importantly, as they see it, the key to success in marketing any product is orchestrating events for the consumer. These events must be immersive and engaging, but above all they should be memorable. So while the time-based nature of the experience means that they are "used up in the moment", [320] the experience might be extended through the purchase and consumption of memorabilia.

Moreover, what these writers suggest is that the sensory experiences provided by this 'new economy' are not only powerfully engaging, but they are also capable of transforming our lives profoundly. Indeed, Pine and Gilmore go as far as to suggest that while companies can provide experiences with highly memorable sensations, the experience economy is driven by something more: people want to be affected by their experiences. As they put it, the "experiences we have affect who we are, what we can accomplish, and where we are going…Human beings have always sought out new and exciting experiences to learn and grow, develop and improve, mend and reform."[321] The 'experience economy' they suggest, is driven not simply by the pursuit of sensory pleasure but by the desire to "transform ourselves, to become different".[322] The 'new economy' then, is guided not simply by hedonism and the pursuit of pleasure, but by aspirations to develop and improve, to be challenged by our experiences and to grow as individuals.

However, in this shift from simple experience to transformation, a significant shift in roles occurs between the buyer and the seller:

> With an experience, the employees of the …company are actors performing parts, creating roles, and building characters to engage guests in entertaining, educational, escapist, and/or esthetic ways. With a transformation, all these experiential realms merely set the stage for helping the customer learn to act.[323]

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[318] Harbord, (2002), 48
[319] Pine and Gilmore, (1999), ix
[320] Harbord, (2002), 48
[321] Pine and Gilmore, (1999), 163
[322] Pine and Gilmore, (1999), 164
[323] Pine and Gilmore (1999), 195

Or perhaps even more succinctly: *the customer is the product*. The sensory and/or emotional experience offered by the company becomes merely the tool with which to mould and shape the body, the mind, the beliefs, the attitudes or the behaviour of the individual. At a fundamental level, the kind of consumption that Pine and Gilmore describe "affects the very being of the buyer".[324] Consumption here becomes more than a functional activity, more than a leisure activity, it is in essence an ontological pursuit, in which the customer seeks to become a better or more enriched person through the purchase of certain experiences.

While the transformational potential of the experience economy might more properly be applied to activities like going to the gym, or attending a self-confidence and self-esteem workshop, the cinema is, nevertheless, a potential site of transformation. However, the possibility of the spectator's transformation is both celebrated and denigrated in equal measure. On the one hand, as I have already suggested in relation to 'make-over' movies like *Now Voyager* and *Sabrina Fair*, to some extent cinema has consistently offered up opportunities for transformation. These films in particular have suggested that women could actively transform not only the way they looked but their entire lives through the consumption of fashion and cosmetics. Indeed, Jackie Stacey's study of audiences during the 1940s and 1950s demonstrates that "the forms of pleasure taken in Hollywood stars are often centrally concerned with appearance and image and involve self-transformation in terms of commodities sold to women to improve their appearance and their bodies".[325] However, as Stacey argues, this form of consumption, promoted by Hollywood as a way of achieving a proper and desirable femininity, is highly normative in its effects. "In a culture where women are denied the status of the subject, modes of subject address within discourses of consumption may affirm identities and offer forms of recognition, even as they encourage women to produce themselves as commodities."[326]

For Nikolas Rose, this kind of subjectification through the market is not only applicable to women, but is a key method of governance in a neo-liberal state in which

> Forms of conduct are governed through a personal labour to assemble a way of life within the sphere of consumption… However constrained by external or internal factors, the modern self is institutionally required to construct a life through the exercise of choice from among alternatives. Every aspect

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[324] Pine and Gilmore, (1999), 172
[325] Stacey, (1993), 218
[326] Stacey, (1994), 219

of life, like every commodity, is imbued with a self-referential meaning; every choice we make is an emblem of our identity, a mark of our individuality, each is a message to ourselves and others as to the sort of person we are.[327]

In terms of cinema then, the choice of what kinds of films to view, to buy, to collect and to display on bookshelves or Facebook pages, becomes a means of forming and expressing an identity. And insofar as these choices are selected from a wide range of mainstream cinema texts, this process is unproblematic.

Similarly the potential for cinema to 'transform' the viewer may be seen as both worthy and desirable. Watching *Hotel Rwanda*[328] in order to gain an understanding of the atrocities committed during Rwanda's civil war, or *Rendition*[329] in order to become more informed and politicised against dubious US Government practices in the war on terror, may well be seen as commendable and intelligent use of one's leisure time. However, the transformative potential of cinema is also a source of widespread cultural anxiety.

As Alison Landsberg points out in her article on 'prosthetic memory', "the mass media fundamentally alter our notion of what counts as experience".[330] Cinema has the capacity to generate experiences and memories which the viewer has never lived, and crucially, she suggests "the memories that cinema affords…might be as significant in constructing, or deconstructing, the spectator's identity as any experience that s/he lived through."[331] And perhaps more importantly, in the process of consuming these experiences, and creating these prosthetic memories, the spectator may be led into forms of behaviour they may never have conceived of before viewing.

As we will see in the next chapter, such fears lie at the heart of the media effects debates, and provide the foundation for the UK's liberal, as opposed to neo-liberal, government of film in the contemporary era. So while in the liberal political climate of the UK, consumers may also be encouraged to seek out forms of identity through the commodities they consume, the apparent potential of cinema, and media more generally, to bring about undesirable social and behavioural effects necessitates its legislative regulation. As Nikolas Rose suggests, under the auspices of liberalism the individual's freedom of choice is

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[327] Rose, (1989), 230-231

[328] *Hotel Rwanda,* directed by Terry George, (UK/USA/Italy/South Africa: United Artists, 2004)

[329] *Rendition,* directed by Gavin Hood, (USA: New Line Cinema, 2007)

[330] Alison Landsberg, 'Prosthetic Memory: *Total Recall* and *Blade Runner*', in *The Cybercultures Reader*, ed. David Bell and Barbara M. Kennedy, (London: Routledge, 2000), 191

[331] Landsberg, (2000), 194

guaranteed only insofar as the viewers "come to act upon themselves as both free and responsible…The openness and riskiness of liberal modes of government…lie in the inescapable *quid pro quo* that what individuals are required to give, they may also refuse."[332] As I will demonstrate in the following chapter, the perceived risk of harm, both to the individual and to society, should individuals refuse to consume films in a 'responsible' way underpins the contemporary regulation of film in the UK. The fear that parents might not act responsibly and prevent their children from gaining access to violent films, for example, was central to the passing of the Video Recordings Act in 1984, an Act in which the viewer, as we shall see, is constructed as the very antithesis of the 'free and responsible individual'.

But for now I want to focus on how the experience of a film is constituted in contemporary cinema. In particular, I want to suggest that the cinematic experience does not begin and end with the text. Rather, our encounter with a text is shaped by the discourses that surround cinema at any given time. I will therefore argue that contemporary film marketing promotes its films precisely as an experience, and as such, constructs the spectator in a very particular way. Moreover, the spectator of contemporary film marketing is constituted as a corporeal entity, whose body is subject to the physical address of contemporary cinema. I will argue that this promotional activity develops an expectation within the consumer that works to 'shape' their relationship with the text, loosening dependence on narrative, the traditional mainstay of classical film, and refocusing the spectator on the potential 'sensations' to be had through their engagement with the text.

As such, I hope to demonstrate that cinema can be fruitfully seen as a set of disciplinary practices "that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behaviour. The human body…entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it."[333] The body, in other words, becomes the focal point for the discourses of cinema. It is subject to the power of the institution: a productive power capable of investing the viewer's body with sensational potential, where areas are intensified and surfaces are electrified[334] in the creation of "sensations, and pleasures".[335] But perhaps more importantly, I want to demonstrate that this kind of textual address is not merely the over-inflated hype of a marketing executive. Rather, I will

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[332] Rose, (1999), 68-9
[333] Foucault, (1984), 182
[334] Foucault, (1990), 44
[335] Foucault, (1990), 151

argue that viewers not only pursue this corporeal relation to the film text, but by engaging with these discourses they are actively involved in the formation of themselves as corporeal subjects, and as such they enhance the capacity of film texts to affect them on a physical level.

Selling the Film Experience

Even during Hollywood's Classical era, when narrative cinema was at its peak, films were routinely marketed to their audience through their capacity to 'thrill', for their 'sensational' qualities, for their ability to 'shock' or on the grounds of sheer 'spectacle'. D.W. Griffith's *America*[336], for example, was billed as "A Thrilling Story of Love and Romance" or "Love of Tender Girlhood! Passionate Deeds of Heroes! A Rushing, Leaping Drama of Charm and Excitement!", while Cecil B. DeMille's *Cleopatra*[337] declares "A Love Affair that Shook the World – Set in a Spectacle of Thrilling Magnificence". In each case, as we can see, the tagline associates the movement of the narrative with physical movement and bodily sensation, suggesting that even as the classical narrative was establishing itself, films were being marketed for their ability to 'move' or affect the viewer. The thrills and excitement are clearly related to the subject matter of the films, drama and romance, but what is being sold is the physicality of the experience.

Similarly, if we look at posters for early horror movies like *The Cat Creeps,*[338] they warned the audience that "It will scare you out of your skin", while adverts for the 1942 film *The Corpse Vanishes*[339] suggest it is "Horror to make your hair stand on end!", and that the audience should "Prepare to shudder when you see the strange practices of this doctor…". Similarly, the 1935 classic *The Bride of Frankenstein*[340] announces that it is "Universal's Shiveriest Sensation!" which is "Not for the young, the scarey, the nervous, BUT if you enjoy thrills, chills and spine-tingling sensation, while your hair stands on

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[336] *America,* directed by D.W. Griffith, (USA: United Artisits, 1924)
[337] *Cleopatra,* directed by Cecil B. DeMille, (USA: Paramount Pictures, 1934)
[338] *The Cat Creeps,* directed by Erle C. Kenton, (USA: Universal Pictures, 1946)
[339] *The Corpse Vanishes,* directed by Wallace Fox, (USA: Monogram Pictures, 1942)
[340] *The Bride of Frankenstein,* directed by James Whale, (USA: Universal Pictures, 1935)

end -- SEE 'The Bride of Frankenstein.'" In each case, what is being sold to the potential viewer through these taglines has very little to do with narrative. Rather, these adverts promise the viewer a physical experience. As Kracauer suggests, these films attempt to engage with the material reality of the spectator, quite literally, they attempt to address "the human being 'with skin and hair [mit Haut und Haar]'"[341]

What Gunning saw as a peculiarity of address in the cinema of attractions is seen by Kracauer as a defining principle of cinema, that is, cinema *as a whole* is a kind of assault on the viewer's senses. For Kracauer, film's primary concern was, and perhaps is, to address its viewer as a corporeal entity. Or as Kracauer himself puts it, " the material elements that present themselves in film directly stimulate the *material layers* of the human being: his nerves, his senses, his entire *physiological substance.*"[342] What these examples of film advertising show is that Kracauer's concern with the physicality of the film experience is no mere academic exercise. This form of marketing shows little concern with plot or narrative, particularly in the case of the early horror films, instead these kinds of posters and trailers promise the viewer a sensation, a physical pleasure, a corporeal experience.

Cinema's promise to deliver a physical experience to its viewer is not restricted to early or classical film of course. If we look through a list of the most successful contemporary films worldwide[343] for example, we see this pattern repeated time and again. Contemporary film uses physicality to sell its films, often focussing primarily on the physical sensations felt in the theatre. Action films like *Twister*[344] and *Vertical Limit*[345] attempt to convey the intensity of the suspense by imploring the audience: "Don't breathe…" and "Hold your breath." Unlike many classical Hollywood films however, the taglines do not simply inform us that it is suspenseful, but refer us to the physical, material, corporeal experience of watching a suspenseful sequence. Even more than adverts that promise that the movie "Pins you to the edge of your seat",[346] these examples focus on the sheer physicality of the experience of watching a film.

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[341] From Kracauer's Marseilles Notebooks, quoted in Miriam Bratu Hansen, 'Introduction', in Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), xvii
[342] Hansen, in Kracauer (1997), xxi
[343] 'All-Time Box Office: World-wide', *The Internet Movie Database,* http://www.imdb.com/boxoffice/alltimegross?region=world-wide, (accessed 8th June 2010)
[344] *Twister*, directed by Jan de Bont, (USA: Warner Brothers Pictures, 1996)
[345] *Vertical Limit*, directed by Martin Campbell, (USA/Germany: Columbia Pictures, 2000)
[346] *Eyewitness*, directed by John Hough, (UK: MGM-EMI, 1970)

Similarly, though perhaps a little more obtusely the marketing tagline for *Saturday Night Fever*[347] shows that even musicals are concerned to sell themselves through the physical. The use of the short phrase 'Catch it!' is an obvious pun on the film's title, and it also clearly refers to the audience going to see the film at the cinema where it will have a finite run. But most importantly it refers to the main attraction of the film, the music and dance routines. In its simplest form it merely implies that the music itself is 'catchy', but crucially it also refers to the physical experience of watching a well-constructed musical. In this instance, what we 'catch' may be as simple as an 'infectious' rhythm or beat. Maybe we tap our foot. Maybe we nod our head. Maybe we sway a little with the movement of the characters on-screen. However it affects us, what we participate in, is a kind of 'contagion'. In dance circles, the term refers to a movement that begins at one end of the chorus and is passed along the rows, like a Mexican wave. The contagion of the musical however, begins on the screen and spreads out among the rows in the theatre. Or in Steven Shaviro's terms, contagion describes the process by which the "viewer is transfixed and transmogrified in consequence of the infectious, visceral contact of images."[348] The poster for *Saturday Night Fever* obviously does not require an intimate knowledge of dance or film theoretical terms to make it readable. The very fact that we describe music as 'catchy' or 'infectious' will suffice. And like the fans of any other genre, viewers of musicals are well aware of the visceral pleasure to be gained from watching.

Action films are more direct, and often promise the viewer a 'movie-ride' experience. Time and again the taglines assure the potential audience that they can "Take the ride of your life!"[349], "Go for a ride you will never forget."[350], or that they should "Get ready for the ride of your life"[351], "Buckle up!"[352] and "Hang on!"[353]. While the last two examples obviously operate as puns that refer back to the title of the movie, they also clearly relate to the experience of watching to the experience of the theme park ride. Like Katherine Bigelow's film *Point Break*[354] which uses the simple tagline "100% pure adrenaline", these films

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[347] *Saturday Night Fever,* directed by John Badham, (USA: Paramount Pictures, 1977)

[348] Shaviro, (1993), 53

[349] *Armageddon*, directed by Michael Bay, (USA: Buena Vista Pictures, 1998)

[350] *Twister*, directed by Jan de Bont, (USA: Warner Brothers Pictures, 1996)

[351] *Total Recall,* directed by Paul Verhoeven, (USA: TriStar Pictures, 1990)

[352] *Con Air,* directed by Simon West, (USA: Buena Vista Pictures, 1997)

[353] *Cliffhanger,* directed by Renny Harlin, (USA: TriStar Pictures, 1993)

[354] *Point Break,* directed by Kathryn Bigelow, (USA: Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, 1991). Note: since this paper was written *Point Break* is no longer one of the highest grossing movies in the IMDb chart. Indeed, even the lowest ranking movie in the list has more than doubled *Point Break's* gross box office.

promise the viewer that the film will be able to affect them on a basic physiological level. They promise that the images and stories that they present will be skilful enough to provoke a rush of excitement that mimics the experience of a theme park. They promise that watching the film can push enough psychological and physiological buttons for our bodies to deliver a much sought after shot of adrenaline.

Other films imply something very similar, but do not relate themselves to the theme park directly. Instead they emphasise the pace and the kinetic qualities of the film. *Speed*[355] impels its audience to "Get ready for rush hour" while *Rush Hour 2*[356] suggests we "Get ready for a second rush!". Again these taglines can be read in more than one way, but alongside straplines that inform us that "Everybody runs", or insists we "Get ready to RUN",[357] "Get ready to fly",[358] or that suggest the film will "Cut to the chase"[359] or even asks "How fast do you want it?",[360] we can see a significant emphasis on the experience of fast-paced physical movement. The attraction of these films, and least as far as we can judge from the movie posters, is clearly based on their fast action sequences, but perhaps more importantly for our discussion here, is that the audience is taken along for the ride.

Similarly, when a film like *Die Hard 2*[361] promises the audience, "Last time it blew you through the back wall of the theatre. This time it will blow you sky-high" or *Pirates of the Caribbean: Curse of the Black Pearl*[362] implores the audience to "Prepare to be blown out of the water" these taglines are doing more than simply suggesting the film might include visually spectacular explosions. It also evokes the reverberations of those sequences as they are felt in the movie theatre. Moreover, like other films under discussion here, these taglines also convey a promise to deliver a certain kinetic, as well as physical, experience for the audience. Indeed, the first person address that begs the audience to "Get Ready" promises that the speed and action won't simply take place in front of them, but they will be part of it. It will be happening with them, even to them. It pledges to deliver a 'direct first-person experience' that ensures

[355] *Speed,* directed by Jan de Bont, (USA: Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, 1994)
[356] *Rush Hour 2,* directed by Brett Ratner, (USA: New Line Cinema, 2001)
[357] *Minority Report,* directed by Steven Speilberg, (USA: Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, 2002)
[358] *Con Air,* directed by Simon West, (USA: Buena Vista Pictures, 1997)
[359] *Gone in Sixty Seconds,* directed by Dominic Sena, (USA: Buena Vista Pictures, 2000)
[360] *2 Fast 2 Furious,* directed by John Singleton, (USA: Universal Pictures, 2003)
[361] *Die Hard 2,* directed by Renny Harlin, (USA: Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, 1990)
[362] *Pirates of the Caribbean: Curse of the Black Pearl,* directed by Gore Verbinski, (USA: The Walt Disney Company, 2003)

that "it's not somebody else who's getting shot at or catapulted out of a rocket. It's you."[363]

The Corporeal Address of the Film Trailer

This concern with the physical experience and corporeal address of cinema is also apparent in film trailers. However, while these trailers may contain the same, or similar, taglines to print advertising, the scope to express the film's potential to produce visceral, kinetic and affective responses is clearly much greater. In this instance, the cinema trailer need not simply tell us what we might experience when we go to see the film. Instead, it makes use of its capacity to demonstrate. Or in other words, cinema trailers often make use of the corporeal address from the very outset. Print adverts for *Spiderman*[364] for example, promised the viewer that s/he would "Go for the ultimate spin", and that the film would "Turn your world upside down", in much the same way as the other action films we have discussed. While the teaser trailer,[365] intended for release in September 2001, though subsequently withdrawn in the wake of September 11th, not only reiterates this promise but delivers a foreshortened 'movie-ride' experience of its own.

The trailer begins slowly, and at first glance appears to be an unremarkable exposition of a narrative film, but as a security guard tries to lock the doors of the closing bank, the mood changes. A rock guitar begins to play, and the pace of editing picks up. A man pushes through the door, and as he walks toward the camera, he reaches inside his jacket to take out a gun. The scene fades to black and the music disappears, before a series of minor explosions burst onto the screen, and a whole succession of hand held semi-POV shots that swing around wildly as the bank is robbed. The images are cut to a fast pace and work to both express and accentuate the confusion and the

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[363] Douglas Trumbull, quoted in Janet Abrams, 'Escape From Gravity', in *Action/Spectacle Cinema: A Sight and Sound Reader,* ed. Jose Arroyo, (London: BFI, 2000), 108
[364] *Spiderman,* directed by Sam Raimi, (USA: Columbia Pictures, 2002)
[365] 'Spiderman Twin Towers (Banned Trailer)', *YouTube,* http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e6vx-o6ldEY&feature=related, (accessed 9th June 2010)

anxiety of the people in the bank, as well as the adrenaline-fuelled, heightened perception of the robbers.

The robbers assure both the film audience and the diegetic public that "It'll all be over in about 30 seconds", and are in and out of the bank in a flurry of fast cuts, close-ups and moving shots. The film's emphasis on spectacular action is hinted at both in the pace and style of editing, as well as in its use of foregrounded explosions and dynamic tracking shots of the robber's helicopter in flight. Until, that is, the audience and the passengers of the helicopter are asked to "Sit back and enjoy the ride!". At this point the helicopter stops abruptly in mid-air. Alarms sound as panic takes hold within the aircraft and money starts to spill out, falling to the street hundreds of metres below. The helicopter is dragged backward through the streets and once again comes to an abrupt halt. The camera pulls back and a snare drum trills militaristically over an ominously drawn-out heavy bass, to reveal the helicopter ensnared in a web. As the camera pulls back further, we see it is caught between the twin towers of the world trade centre. The dynamism and excitement of the traditional action-oriented heist movie is thoroughly eclipsed by the hyperbolic spectacle of these CGI effects.

The trailer implicitly acknowledges the audience in this first section, but it is not until after we are implored to "Sit back and enjoy the ride!" that the film truly reveals itself as a source of awe-inspiring spectacle and the visceral effects of the 'movie-ride'. Like the print advertising for the film, the trailer uses intertitles to demand that, "Next Summer", "GO", "FOR", "THE", "ULTIMATE", "SPIN". This is accompanied in the trailer by a dance/soft-rock sound track that announces "I wanna take you on a rollercoaster". And the promise of the soundtrack is reinforced with scenes of Spiderman whipping through the air toward the space of the viewer, and dynamic moving shots which follow behind Spiderman in close proximity as he swings through the streets of New York in a hyperbola, mimicking the movement of a rollercoaster.

The trailer, then, emphasises the experiential nature of the film and its desire to present a 'movie-ride' for the viewer. It emphasises movement and the dizzy excitement of speed. But where the titles tell us what we might expect, the images actually give us a taste of the experience. But perhaps the key to the excitement in this last part of the trailer is its contrast with the earlier scene. While the robbery and escape suggested both pace and action, the abandonment of realistic storytelling and naturalistic effects successfully ups the ante in terms of providing the viewer with a kinetic experience. The fast paced

editing, minor explosions and a stunted sense of vertigo pale into insignificance compared to plunging and swinging wildly through the streets of New York. This trailer does not simply offer its visual effects as an experiential attraction, it suggests that the experience one might gain from its visual effects are qualitatively more intense than those to be found in movies grounded by narrative realism.

By contrast, the trailer[366] for the supernatural horror film *White Noise*[367] works hard to ground its offerings in reality. The voiceover announces at its very outset that "What you are about to hear is real. It has not been edited or enhanced." What follows are a series of muffled, whispered or distorted voices that utter short phrases, interspersed with 'educational' material that introduces the audience to E.V.P. or 'Electronic voice phenomenon", whereby the dead can make use of electronic media in order to talk to the living. And this claim to the 'factual' nature of E.V.P. is reinforced at the end of the trailer by a link that directs the viewer to a website offering a number of articles on the phenomenon.

But despite its claims to fact, the trailer for *White* Noise no less than the trailer for Spiderman offers the viewer a particular kind of filmic experience, which is not dissimilar to the 'movie-ride' presented in the *Spiderman* trailer. The imagery at the beginning of the trailer moves jerkily between a green-tinged, streaky, over-exposed, double- exposed or negative image of a tape recorder, a close-up of a visual display panel of an instrument that registers the volume and frequency of the 'ghostly' voices we hear, and images of the people we hear speaking. They are often jump cut, and/or flick between the green-tinged, simulated 'white noise' and 'negative' effects. But in addition, we also see flashes of other images: half seen faces appear and disappear in the space of a few frames, in negative, hidden by bursts of light, or masked by the green-tinged 'white noise'; an eerie flash of an image suggestive of two luminous eyes and a jaw, or collar line; or even simply a hand reaching out from analogue interference toward the audience. The trailer then, animates its own tagline "The dead are trying to get hold of you" in both a literal and a figurative sense. That is, on the one hand they may try to contact us through electronic devices, but they may also try to physically grab you!

The trailer also relies heavily on the use of white noise, as well as a series of jarring sounds and single notes, very high pitched and edgy, or low,

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[366] 'White Noise Trailer', *Apple.com*, http://www.apple.com/trailers/universal/white_noise/large.html (accessed 9th June 2010)
[367] *White Noise,* directed by Geoffrey Sax, (USA: Universal Pictures, 2005)

resonant and bassy. These sound effects underscore the movement in the images, and crucially, mark the eerie flash frames, heightening their impact. A short musical phrase repeats over and over in the background, like the *Twilight Zone*, before it gives way to the sound of a heart beat at around 100 beats per minute, simulating the rate of an anxious and apprehensive spectator. The sound effects work then, not simply to set the viewer on edge, but they actively address the body of the spectator.

This corporeal address is reinforced in the second section of the trailer that gives us a taste of the film's narrative, in which a husband attempts to contact his dead wife. The voice over declares that "our loved ones can reach us. But if they can come through, who else can come through?", and the naturalistic depiction of a grieving man, snaps back to the familiar green-tinged imagery of E.V.P. The camera zooms in on the visual display of voice frequency, and the single green line explodes into what appears to be a tunnel. Shadows appear in the centre of the tunnel as the camera, apparently, rushes towards them, and fingerlike extensions appear to grab from the edge of the screen, before the entire image is engulfed in blackness. The trailer cuts to Michael Keaton worriedly watching another screen, before we are sutured into his point of view to see a highly pixelated image of a man, mouth wide open with teeth filed into points, rushing directly out of the screen. While this image is ostensibly aimed at Michael Keaton, the address of the image is direct. The spectator has no sooner been anxiously 'drawn into' the image than something both sudden and frightening rushes out. This attempt to both make the audience jump and to literally push the viewer back in their chairs, is mirrored by Keaton on screen, as he whizzes backward in his desk chair, and an unearthly voice shouts at him indistinctly.

The trailer sells the film on the strength of its claim that "The subject of some movies is so disturbing, that those who experience them will never be the same again", at once highlighting the experiential nature of viewing, as well as promising the audience a very particular kind of affect. The trailer works to emphasise the physical/corporeal experience of fear and anxiety. However, it does more than simply tell the viewer what to expect, rather it attempts to deliver a small taste of the kind of experience s/he might encounter. Like so many other horror films, the trailer for *White Noise* is concerned with not only promoting but demonstrating its capacity to provoke a physical response within the viewer. And of course, unlike print advertising, the film trailer can make full use of its audiovisual capacity and use techniques such as abstract

soundscapes, sound effects, single frame flashes and kinetic effects to unsettle the viewer and eventually to 'shock' them. But further, insofar as the imagery engages in a first person address, simulating a kind of 'immersion' in the image, as well as displaying objects rushing out of the screen space towards the space of the viewer, this trailer, to all intents and purposes is no less of a 'movie-ride' than the many CGI extravaganzas.

Of course, the specific kinds of affects and experiences promised by film marketing are highly genre specific, and the horror genre obviously trades in its ability to scare its viewer. *The Exorcist*[368], for example, on its re-release in 1998 touted itself as "The scariest movie of all time", while the small independent movie *The Blair Witch Project*[369] is happy to settle with "As scary as hell". In terms of marketing itself on its ability to affect its audience, its ability to produce a physical sensation for them, both of these films nail their colours to the mast. The poster declares the affect it produces as its main attraction, and in the process, promises the viewer a certain kind of experience.   But what is interesting about the marketing of horror films in general, and is clearly demonstrated by the trailer for *White Noise,* is that it promises not only an immediate experience for the viewer watching in the cinema, but a continuing one.

Like action films, horror assures its viewers of its ability to affect them. *The Ring,*[370] for example, guarantees that "Everyone will suffer", one assumes both on-screen and in the theatre. But horror films offer more than a mere 'thrill-ride', like *White Noise*, they frequently promise "that those who experience them will never be the same again." *Jaws*[371] for example, not only declares itself "The most terrifying motion picture from the terrifying No1 best-seller", but famously declared "You'll never go in the water again!". While in a similar vein, *Sleepy Hollow*[372] asks that you "Close your eyes. Say your prayers. Sleep if you can." What is key here is that the affect, fear, is not simply something that is enjoyed within the safety of the cinema, both *Jaws* and *White Noise* promote themselves on the strength of their ability to provoke fear so intense that it will permanently affect the viewer. But what is even more remarkable, is that this purported ability to affect the viewer in this way is both promoted, and is treated by consumers of horror film, as a desirable quality. Although as we shall see in the

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[368] *The Exorcist,* directed by William Friedkin, (USA: Warner Brothers Pictures, 1973)
[369] *The Blair Witch Project,* directed by Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez, (USA: Artisan Entertainment, 1999)
[370] *The Ring*, directed by Gore Verbinski, (USA: USA/Japan: Dreamworks Distribution, 2002)
[371] *Jaws*, directed by Steven Speilberg, (USA: Universal Pictures, 1975)
[372] *Sleepy Hollow,* directed by Tim Burton, (USA/Germany: Paramount Pictures, 1999)

next chapter, this potential for the viewer to be transformed, or at least permanently affected by what s/he sees in the cinema is both a source of pleasure for the audience and a source of concern for society.

Addressing the Audience

The first person, direct address of film trailers like *Spiderman* and *White Noise* both reinforces the 'movie-ride' quality of the film but also hints at the importance of the 'experience' in selling a film to its audience. But while the centrality of the audience's cinematic experience is merely implied in both the *Spiderman* and the *White Noise* trailers, it is made entirely explicit in adverts for *My Bloody Valentine*[373] and *Paranormal Activity*[374]. In both these cases, the 'experiential' quality of the film is emphasised by the presence of a diegetic audience.

In the first instance, after introducing the basic narrative set-up of the film, the trailer for *My Bloody Valentine* implores the viewer to "Prepare to witness the most frightening 3D motion picture event to tear through the screen." Throughout, the trailer moves between positioning the spectator as an observer of the diegetic audience's reactions, and positioning him/her as a member of that fictional audience. The on-screen audience shrink from a diegetic search light, duck to avoid a pick-axe, recoil and cover their heads to avoid being burnt by an on-screen explosion. We can reasonably assume therefore that the diegetic audience's reactions are part of the 'experiential' promise of the trailer, in which case, the brief images of the on-screen audience clearly attempt to sell, not so much the 'frightening' quality of the text, but rather the direct experience of 'assault' at the hands of 3D technology. This experience is reinforced through the use of a first-person direct address as the spectator is placed amongst the cinematic audience and these same objects rush out of the screen towards him/her. The trailer clearly attempts to sell the film as a "3D ride to hell", but

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[373] *My Bloody Valentine,* directed by Patrick Lussier, (USA: Lionsgate, 2009). Trailer available from, 'My Bloody Valentine', *YouTube,* http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TItTjEJYFDQ, (accessed 10th June 2010)

[374] *Paranormal Activity,* directed by Oren Peli, (USA: Paramount Pictures, 2007). Trailer available from, '"Paranormal Activity" – Official Trailer [HQ HD]', *YouTube,* http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F_UxLEqd074, (accessed 10th June 2010)

perhaps more importantly, it also seeks to legitimise, perhaps even encourage, this kind of reaction in the auditorium. Ducking, recoiling and shrinking in one's seat are all presented as a 'natural' and desirable effect of the technological encounter rather than a sign of one's weakness or naïveté.

By contrast, although I would argue that the trailer for *Paranormal Activity* also legitimises extreme audience reactions in face of the film, the diegetic audience are used to demonstrate how effective the film text, rather than the film technology, is in delivering an experience to the viewer. Like all of the trailers we have looked at so far, the marketing for *Paranormal Activity* self-consciously promotes itself precisely as an experience. The trailer uses quotes from film reviews that tell us that the film is "one of the scariest movies of all time" and that it is "…genuinely horrifying…" before exhorting the viewer to "experience it for yourself". As with *My Bloody Valentine,* the trailer switches between positioning the spectator as an observer of the diegetic audience and a participant in the filmic experience. However, unlike *My Bloody Valentine*, this audience are presented as ordinary members of the public who were "among the first to experience the movie". Throughout, the film is presented less as a narrative unfolding than a series of intensely affective scenes, and the focus consistently remains on how the audience react to those scenes: they scream and jump; they gape at the screen; they cover their ears, their heads, their mouths; they avert their eyes and hide their faces; and grip onto one another in trepidation. In sum, the trailer shows the film to be an intensely affective experience, and like the other trailers under discussion here, the film demonstrates its capacity to produce the same effects in the spectator in the closing image where a body is thrown out toward the screen, once again simulating the first person direct address we have come to associate with the movie ride experience.

But what is most interesting about this trailer is that among the quotes from film reviews used, is one from *Dread Central* which reads: "The entire auditorium was freaked out of their minds…people were visibly shaken". The quote is obviously fitting because of the congruence between this review and the reactions of the diegetic audience, but it also tells us something of the particular nature of this filmic experience. First and foremost, it is constructed not simply as a filmic experience, but more precisely, it is a cinematic one. It is constituted as a collective encounter with the text, and indeed, the focus on the viewing audience in both the trailer and in this particular film review suggests that the

experience is as much about watching other members of the audience as it is about viewing the film.

Watching the film viewer

As Martin Barker and Kate Brooks' study of viewers of *Judge Dredd*[375] shows, this concern with the experiential and corporeal address of film is not merely a marketing strategy. Rather, the physicality of the film experience is absolutely central to many film-goers. In their study, Barker and Brooks grouped the participants into six 'patterns of involvement'. Each of these six patterns represented a particular way that a viewer might choose to relate to the film, with varying degrees of commitment. At least two of these 'patterns' or spaces, as Barker and Brooks call them, emphasised physicality as the primary source of involvement and pleasure from the film. Moreover, the largest group, the action-adventure 'space' which sought the excitement and thrills of the 'roller-coaster ride' from its films, emphasised characteristics of the film such as pace, rhythm, suspense and danger. For this group films were not about plot, rather "they begin, they do something (preferably physical) to you, they end – end of experience!"[376] This group focussed on the film *in the present tense*, as it was happening; as they experienced it.

Similarly those who occupied a 'future-fantastic space' also adopted a profoundly visceral relation to film. As with the action-adventure group, those with this orientation considered that films should 'do' something to a viewer, like making them jump or gasp. Further, this group felt that to be ready, the audience should prepare to be 'bowled over'. Here this group is involved in a process of building excitement for oneself, independent of the text. And indeed they also felt that the 'hype' that accompanied a film was part of the excitement.

Stallone-followers also prioritised the physicality of the film experience, though in a much more muted way. Stallone-followers went to the cinema for

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[375] Martin Barker and Kate Brooks, *Knowing Audiences: Judge Dredd, Its Friends, Fans and Foes*, (London: University of Luton Press, 1998)
[376] Barker and Brooks, (1998), 155

their viewing "to experience the impact",[377] but thereafter, this experience was subsumed within their more general concern with the life and films of Sylvester Stallone himself. Nevertheless, this group went on to purchase the video, not simply to add to the collection, but to relive the viewing experience, while the film itself represented "a high point in a continuum of preparation and expectation"[378] and was in itself a "new experience to collect".[379]

Among the other groups, the 2000AD space did not prioritise physicality. Indeed they appeared to blatantly reject the filmic form for its undermining of the authenticity of their comic-book hero. 2000AD-followers did not want to see Judge Dredd 'Hollywood-ised, or 'blockbuster-ised'. But even here, members of the group suggested that it was "important to see Dredd at the cinema, for the experience of him making it to the mainstream, for that shiver of pleasure when he appears on the big screen."[380] This audience's engagement with the film is clearly of a very different order to that of the first two groups, but what is interesting is that even as they reject the standards and values of the Hollywood blockbuster, the appreciation they express is couched in the language of the physical. Their physical response has little to do with the textual operations, and yet still their primary motivation for seeing the film at the cinema is to gain a physical satisfaction.

It is perhaps only the 'culture-belonging' space that has seemingly little to do with the physicality of film, prioritising instead, the social relationship within which cinema occurred, and was made use of. It is pertinent here however, to acknowledge that individuals rarely, if ever, complied to just one space, more usually they spanned more than one. This is particularly true of the final space: the film-follower. Here the researchers rarely found someone who complied 'only' with this grouping. Within this space, the film-follower sees him/herself as an expert. As such "the film-follower can watch a film for audience reaction, from which s/he is separate" and while "the audience reaction is part of the filmic experience", as an expert s/he was not party to it. As Barker and Brooks put it, "Lay people react to film, the film-follower studies it. Part of what is studied is its very ability to cause a reaction". But even here film-followers admitted that they "may react at first, and then watch it again to gain distance".[381] Indeed ideally "on first viewing…the film should be absorbing, so that it can be 'lived'

[377] Barker and Brooks, (1998), 170
[378] Barker and Brooks, (1998), 170
[379] Barker and Brooks, (1998), 171
[380] Barker and Brooks, (1998), 164
[381] Barker and Brooks, (1998), 167

emotionally first. Later it can be weighed up more intellectually."[382] So even as people who choose to occupy this space denied the physicality of film, their corporeality was never entirely left behind.

Although the focus of Barker and Brooks' study is very specific, looking only at the audience for one movie, what it suggests is that the corporeal address that is suggested by film posters is not merely a marketing construct. Indeed they show that a physical or corporeal engagement with a film is not only actively enjoyed and pursued by many of the audience members, but for some, it was the main reason for going to see the film. And further, this study demonstrates that the draw of cinema may be as much about watching other members of the audience to see how they react as it is about larger screens and digital surround sound. That is, the cinematic experience is not merely an effect of technology, and nor is it simply the result of the spectator succumbing "to complete sensory and bodily engulfment",[383] rather, for at least a portion of the cinema audience, watching others' reactions to films is part of the pleasure of cinema viewing. In this sense, cinema is less a mass event, with all the connotations of passivity, helplessness and hysteria, and more a social one, where the audience itself is part of the attraction; part of the viewing experience.

The play of gazes within the cinema then, is not restricted to spectator/screen relations, but is also a function of the cinematic space. Watching and being watched are part of the cinema experience, and as a result, the cinematic subject might be characterised less as a passive product of representational practice and more as a performative act. The audiences' performance within the theatre is important in two senses. Firstly, as Zillman et al. have amply demonstrated, the active display of 'appropriate' responses to a horror film directly contributes to the enjoyment of the movie by others. In particular, in their study of first year undergraduate horror audiences, they found that:

> Enjoyment of horror…was strongly influenced by the presence
> of an opposite-gender companion and his or her affective
> behavior in response to the stimulus. Men enjoyed horror more
> than did women. More important, they enjoyed horror most in
> the company of a distressed woman and least in the company
> of a fear-mastering woman. Women, in contrast, enjoyed

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[382] Barker and Brooks, (1998), 168
[383] Kuhn, (1999), 5

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horror the least in the company of a distressed man and the most in the company of a fear-mastering man.[384]

Zillman et al. argue that the cinematic encounter with the horror film is a contemporary rite of passage akin to tests of bravery in hunter-gatherer societies. Young men, they suggest, are expected to learn to gain mastery over their emotions and show calm in the face of fear, while young women are expected to learn to display their dependency needs by expressing fear, distress and panic. While the analogy between contemporary horror film and a somewhat mythical cultural test of manhood seems incredibly dubious, the notion that the individual's responses to film texts might be both a learned behaviour and a deeply social one, seems far more plausible. Moreover, their finding that what counts as an 'appropriate' reaction to a horror film is highly gender specific, at least for this cohort of undergraduates, points to the highly socially and culturally specific nature of what is deemed 'appropriate' in face of the film text.

Secondly, as we shall see in the next chapter, the performative nature of cinema viewing not only provides pleasure for others it may also, as Matt Hills argues, form part of a 'project of the self'. As he puts it:

> Pleasure-as-performance is always a cultural act, an articulation of identity: 'I am the sort of person who takes this sort of pleasure in this sort of media product.' Horror's pleasures – and displeasures – thus work within patterns of cultural reproduction, as fans enact their cultural distinctions from one another, or from non-fans, and as scholars enact their cultural distinctions from one another and from 'untutored' audiences.[385]

Watching the horror film therefore can be seen as an opportunity to define the self, both in terms of one's immediate performance during viewing and in the later discussions of the film where one is able to perform one's identity as, for example, a 'horror fan' or a 'concerned citizen'.

Anticipation and Transformation

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[384] Dolf Zillman, James B. Weaver, Norbert Mundorf, and Charles F. Aust, 'Effects of an Opposite-Gender Companion's Affect to Horror on Distress, Delight, and Attraction', in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 51, no.3, (1986), 592
[385] Hills, (2005), ix

Within her study of audiences of violent film Annette Hill argues that viewing violent movies may well test the viewer. In this instance however, she does not liken it to a rite of passage. Rather, she suggests that the possibility the viewer might not be able to cope psychologically with the images that they will witness on the screen is actually a crucial part of the experience of watching a highly anxiety provoking film. In the case of violent film, it is not that viewers pursue images of violence in and of themselves. On the contrary, the viewers are well aware of the extreme nature of the imagery they will witness before entering the cinema. The 'experience' therefore does not begin and end with viewing the film, rather, the formation of the filmic 'experience' begins with the viewer's exposure to the wider discourses surrounding the particular movie they were about to see. Moreover, coupled with an understanding of their own personal capacity for tolerance with regard to violent imagery, participants treated violent film as a way of testing their 'boundaries'. Knowledge of the likely content and potential effects of watching such images, in terms of fear, disgust or shock, was therefore an intrinsic part of the viewer's experience. Indeed, Hill suggests that the anticipation of particularly harrowing scenes not only contributed to the particular receptive mode adopted toward the film as a whole, but also contributed to specific responses toward individual scenes. As Hill puts it, "boundary testing involves participants identifying a threshold of violence and choosing whether to self-censor or not. The way in which participants utilize this consumer choice is through anticipating and preparing for violent scenes to occur".[386]

What Hill's study suggests is that this process of boundary testing with regard to violent film is at once both thrilling and an extremely self-conscious activity. As one participant puts it, "I love the thrill of daring yourself to watch a violent scene – that's a real kick. No, I'm not going to watch and then yeah, just do it, make yourself watch it."[387] What this suggests of course, is that the viewer of violent film truly is a disciplined subject. Further, in the case of the 'controversial' films studied by Hill, this study shows that the viewer was not only well aware of the likely content of the film they were about to view, but were also aware of the media reports and social debates that surround these films. Indeed, as Hill suggests:

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[386] Hill, (1997), 66
[387] Hill, (1997), 73

> Audience awareness is closely linked with physical and emotional responses to violent movies…A key factor in the range of response available is the role of anticipation when viewing violence. Anticipation heightens response, increases excitement and emphasizes the significance of preparation: participants anticipate the worst that can happen and prepare themselves for just such an imaginary event.[388]

Moreover, Hill argues that while watching a violent film the majority of participants paid attention to the audience's reaction as a whole. In this instance, at least part of the pleasure of viewing such films was to monitor the reaction of others, and in turn, participants were able to 'gauge' their own response in relation to the responses of others.[389] The viewing of the film therefore takes place within the context of debates about the morality of such imagery, as well as discussions of 'appropriate' or normal responses to such imagery, for example, whether or not it is normal or acceptable to enjoy or to be excited by images of rape or torture. The discourses that surround these particular films do not simply create a corporeal subject equipped with a suitable mode of reception for a specific form of entertainment. Rather, these discourses differentiate between the normal and the abnormal spectator, and as such attempt to exert a kind of cultural control over the viewer. Or as Butler might put it, the viewer's perfomativity should be understood "as that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains".[390] While we will return to this point in the next chapter, what Hill's study suggests is that these media debates are more than simply a call for the censorship of 'inappropriate' or 'offensive' imagery. Instead the focus of these debates is often on the spectators themselves, and the controversy that surrounds such films prompts a process of continuous monitoring, regulation and control; a process that forms an intrinsic part of the constitution of the corporeal spectator.

However, while the spectator may be monitored by institutions, individuals actively and willingly engage in a process of monitoring their own reactions in relation to the responses of those around them, effectively comparing themselves to the social norm on an everyday basis. Normalisation of audience response to certain images then, may well begin in the media, but on a social level, it would appear that many members of the audience willingly engage in a process of creating themselves as 'normal' and 'appropriate'

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[388] Hill, (1997), 27
[389] Hill, (1997), 27
[390] Butler, (1993), 187

cinematic subjects, engaging in the processes of anticipation, preparation, audience monitoring, self-monitoring and self-censorship where necessary.

But while this kind of viewing activity may well produce a 'socially acceptable' viewing subject, as Foucault suggests, censorship, even self-censorship, is a productive process, and in this instance I would suggest that this continuous self-monitoring, self-regulation and self-control exhibited by the viewers of violent film actively contribute to the intensity of the experience. The media hype that surrounds such movies, for example, means that the viewer's physical and emotional response to such a film is actually a subject for discussion. In effect there is an 'incitement to discourse' with regard to the film's affective capacity and the individual's experience of the film. This incitement requires a process of self-monitoring, which prompts the viewer to look inward and pay attention to the physical signals of their own heightened anxiety – or the lack thereof. Engaging in such a process means that the viewer is likely to become acutely aware of even small fluctuations in their own internal state, and a raised heartbeat or increased tension is unlikely to pass unnoticed. In a very real sense then, the affective experience of watching such a film is potentially intensified by virtue of its controversial status, but its success depends on the efforts of the viewer in the creation of this very particular form of cinematic subjectivity.

While Hill focuses solely on violent films, I would suggest that horror movies demand a similar form of engagement from the viewer, and that the process of boundary testing is also central to this genre. Moreover, the marketing of horror films also suggests an awareness of the need to both anticipate and prepare for the cinematic event. *The Silence of the Lambs*[391] for example, demands: "Prepare yourself for the most exciting, mesmerising and terrifying two hours of your life." As I have already suggested, taglines for popular action films also entreat the viewer to "Get ready!". Here the first person address of these imperative statements promises that the viewer will experience the kinetic thrill of these films, but it also suggests, in keeping with Annette Hill's findings, that the viewer of the action film is more than a passive recipient of a physical experience. On the contrary, the viewer is being asked to prepare themselves for it, and this, I think, is actually quite remarkable.

Despite the lack of media or critical interest in these kinds of films, it appears that the process of anticipation and preparation identified by Hill may

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[391] *The Silence of the Lambs,* directed by Jonathan Demme, (USA: Orion Pictures Corporation, 1991)

still have validity within these genres. These marketing campaigns clearly attempt to induce a state of anticipation and excitement about the film's release, but the particular mode of address employed by the campaign specifically asks the viewer to prepare themselves for the physical sensations they will experience during the film. On one level, the viewer is asked to adopt an appropriate mode of reception that will allow them to enjoy such a corporeal address within the cinema, in effect to create themselves as a corporeal subject. However, these marketing campaigns take place outside of the cinema, they may even be seen by a potential audience months before the film goes on release. Preparing oneself is, therefore, not simply a matter of engaging with a film text in a particular way. The viewer, in this instance, is asked to actively participate in the creation of a heightened state of arousal before entering the cinema.

The purpose of the campaign may be to induce a viewer to go and see the film, but further, it suggests that the film text depends on the viewer to participate in the creation of the experience. That is, the excitement and anticipation that the marketing attempts to provoke might actually play a crucial part in the physicality of the textual encounter, particularly in the case of horror film. As I have already suggested, the process of continuous self-monitoring may well work to intensify the experience, but more than this, exposure to the marketing and/or media that surrounds a film may also influence the quality of the experience. For example, if we assume for one moment that the purpose of a horror film is to provoke, fear, anxiety and/or shock within the viewer, then it stands to reason that if the viewer enters the cinema already in a heightened state of anxiety, then the likelihood of the film text producing the desired response is increased. The incitement to prepare oneself then, suggests that engagement with a film, and particularly horror films, does not begin and end with the text itself, rather film marketing incites a form of engagement with the film, or at the very least the kind of experience it has to offer, before the viewer ever enters the cinema.

This kind of film marketing then, does not simply address the viewer as a corporeal subject and promise to deliver physical sensations and thrills in line with that mode of address, but actively encourages the viewer to participate, and enter into a state of heightened arousal before entering the cinema. Viewers are encouraged to enter into a particular mode of reception; to actively create themselves as corporeal subjects in order to fully appreciate the particular form of experiential address offered by particular movie genres.

Moreover, if we return to Annette Hill's work, she suggests that the discourses surrounding a film may even change the viewer's perception of the film while they are actually viewing it. That is:

> It is the build-up of anticipation and a desire to test boundaries which is significant to participants' response to the visual effect of the ear-slicing sequence. Participants anticipate and prepare for extreme violence…It is this build-up to the ear-slicing sequence which creates a sense of anticipation so great many group members believe they see the ear being sliced.[392]

As Hill suggests, the anticipation of violence is a process that leads viewers to imagine scenes that do not appear on the screen. A combination of the hype surrounding the ear-slicing scene in *Reservoir Dogs* and the diegetic 'signposting' that something terrible is about to happen, colluded in leading these viewers to anticipate and prepare to the extent that they actively intensified their experience through imagining graphic scenes that were not present on the screen.

Anticipation and fear in Horror

As Hill's study suggests with regard to violent film, anticipatory fear and excitement are also reinforced by press that surrounds such films. Urban myths about the physical and psychological effects of horror films abound, but far from putting fans off visiting the theatre, they simply stimulate their anticipation more. And reading through user comments on the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) for films like *The Exorcist* it is clear just how often these urban myths are repeated:

> In late 1973 and early 1974, women and men were lined up for blocks. People were known to become ill watching it. Some fainted. Some ran out of the theater in tears. There were reports of people having to be institutionalized, and at least one miscarriage was attributed to viewing it. No, it wasn't a Rolling Stones Concert. It was a film called The Exorcist.[393]

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[392] Hill, (1997), 97

[393] Joseph Riesenbeck (eazyguy62), 'IMDb user reviews for The Exorcist (1973)', *The Internet Movie Database,* http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0070047/usercomments?count=885&start=0, (accessed 6th Feb 2007)

Many suggest that these reports are ridiculous, since they themselves thought the film was not scary by contemporary standards, or worse still, laughable, while others suggest that it was just this over-hyping that ruined their experience of the film. But what shows in their reviews is their disappointment in the film's inability to provide the kind of intensity of experience they had expected and, presumably, hoped for:

> I first watched The Exorcist around 3 years ago: like everyone else nowadays, I watched it expecting an earth-shattering experience in horror. I was sorely disappointed when instead I saw a careful character study. I didn't hate it, but I did feel cheated.[394]

> I too waited 30 years to see this film. I remember there being lots of talk about it when it came out even though I was quite young. A mythology has built up around it over the years and I was expecting to jump at least once during the film.

> Not remotely scary.[395]

But still others draw on these urban myths to support their own view of how good the film is, and to suggest to others the reasons why they should see the film.   Far from putting people off, these urban myths and/or the associated controversy about the content of horror films seems simply to fuel their desire to see the film more:

> I saw this movie during its initial run… I worked in a book store and had seen the book but had never read it and then all the controversy about this movie hit the airwaves. People were being carted away in ambulances and running screaming from the theaters. Either TIME or NEWSWEEK ran a cover story on people being possessed… I was going to see it when it finally came to town (it was delayed for several months and was almost banned in my city)… My brother who was in college begged me not to see (he had found the Lord and thought it was blasphemous), he said I was going to hell. Oh well, I saw it anyway.[396]

And further, this kind of hype actively promotes an emotional engagement with the experience before one ever enters the cinema, as one user reports:

> I'll confess that I was frightened just to rent the film. The things I had heard about it were terrifying - a girl possessed by the devil saying inverted words, masturbating with a crucifice, etc…Even with all that, I decided to rent "The Exorcist". So I

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[394] Eumenides-0, 'IMDb user reviews'
[395] Tim, 'IMDb user reviews'
[396] gunshotwound, 'IMDb user reviews'

> watched it and I'll just say one word. No, two- scary and perfect. [397]

And it seems, anecdotally at least, that movie theatres are not immune from fuelling this hype and adding to the fear and anticipation involved in going to see a scary film. The midnight showing of classic horror movies is an obvious example, but as one user reports, some theatres are prepared to take it a step further: "I watched this film in 1973 at the age of 17 at a local theater with a friend when it was first released (they were handing out sickness bags at the door)",[398] Phill-13 concludes "Watch this film. But don't do it alone."

Judging from these unsolicited user comments, media reports of intense and apparently overwhelming physical responses work to lure viewers to the theatre rather than put them off. And so one might reasonably assume that, at least a proportion of the cinema-goers are actively pursuing this intense experience, that the very possibility of being 'overcome' was exciting enough that one would actively seek out that experience. Furthermore, users report that being warned of the lasting effects of exposure to the film does little to dissuade them either, on the contrary, the possibility of being so disturbed that one had nightmares actively encouraged them to see the film. As one viewer put it, "When I announced my desire to watch "The Exorcist," many people warned me that I would have nightmares upon watching the film. This intrigued me all the more, of course, so I eagerly watched the film."[399] Indeed many contributors to the IMDB cite how disturbed they were by the film as a particular reason why one should go to see it. Brian Harris, for example, suggests "No movie has ever disturbed me quite like this one. When I say disturbed I don't mean upsetting, but more like, once you see it you will be haunted by it for years to come… You will not [be]disappointed." While videocaptain maintains that

> ...it will certainly move you in ways you have never thought possible. It is THE perfect horror film. After watching the Exorcist for the first time (10 years old), I had nightmares for months! I actually thought that demons and the devil existed and can enter your body at any time...boy was I frightened to death. Even 'till this day, I still get shivers up my spine when I watch this film...it still makes my hair stand on end.

And BeccaLeo suggests, "Do not watch this film by yourself. Have one or more people with you and be prepared for the after affects of the film on your subconscious mind…you will more than likely have bad dreams over this

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[397] stanleykowalski, 'IMDb user reviews'
[398] phill-13, 'IMDb user reviews'
[399] howYOUdoin, 'IMDb user reviews'

movie." As I have already suggested, the idea that watching this film might provoke an immediate and extreme response is a selling point, and further, the notion that this may have a lasting effect on the consciousness or perception of the viewer is actively promoted by this particular film-watching community as a particular reason to watch the film.

Moreover, as BeccaLeo points out, it is important to be prepared. An idea repeated by several contributors to the site:

> If you are going to watch this film, BE PREPARED!!![400]

> I just watched it again, and it was still the scariest movie I'd ever seen… Even when I watched again I felt giddy afterwards. It will mainly work for horror fans, like me, because most people don't believe in that devil shit. Be prepared if you rent this one out.[401]

> My gosh, THE EXORCIST scared the crap out of me! I usually sit down and watch a horror movie and just move on. This is different…This is just terrifying. This is a must-see for horror fans, but be prepared. 9/10[402]

This incitement to prepare, of course, appears to be less about hyping oneself up in order to increase the intensity of the experience than it is about steeling oneself against the intensity, or preparing oneself mentally for the filmic assault, and viewers take pains to suggest the dangers of not preparing adequately:

> When The Exorcist was first released in December 1973, the audience wasn't prepared for what it was about to see. Patrons fainted, entire towns banned the film, and some couldn't believe it was only given an R rating, instead of an X.[403]

> I first saw The Exorcist on my own, underage and unprepared back in 1974. It terrified me. My walk home from the cinema meant that I had to cut across dark, isolated farmland. Every noise of every hidden creature became a demon in the shadows.[404]

> I saw the original version of The Exorcist yonks ago, and just saw the Directors Cut today on the big screen…I thought it was the scariest freakin movie I'd ever seen in my life. I know I'm not gonna sleep tonight and I hate myself for reminding myself about the film. As the movie developed I recalled certain scenes, but still wasn't prepared by the full impact of it. The infamous "Spiderwalk" scene almost left me running from the cinema screaming like a little girl. Even though it is a brilliant movie; great to see that style of horror is still

[400] Ryan Adams (uncle_kracker_2000@hotmail.com), 'IMDb user reviews'
[401] Tony Clifton-3, 'IMDb user reviews'
[402] Matt-14 , 'IMDb user reviews'
[403] CitizenCaine, 'IMDb user reviews'
[404] Croftman, 'IMDb user reviews'

> aprecciated today - I still hated it. For the mark it left on my
> psyche, which is totally shredded by the way.[405]

Preparation here then is seen as a way of forestalling the 'full impact' of the film, a way of developing the requisite ability to deal with the events and images one will witness when watching the movie, and avoiding embarrassing public displays of 'inappropriate' responses like "running from the cinema screaming like a little girl."

However, while people were aware of the media hype that surrounded the film's original release, the intensity of the debate and the enormity of the fears that surrounded the film were not repeated when the film was re-released in 1998. The discourses then, that I have argued, work to stimulate fear and excitement before going to experience a film of this kind were notably absent at the time when many of these first-time viewers saw the film. This may in part explain why many people reported that the film was not scary 'by today's standards', and attributed the reports to the naïveté of the previous generation of filmgoers. Nevertheless, those who did talk about how much they enjoyed the movie often stressed the importance of preparation and highlighted their own sense of anticipation before going to see the film. These reports are often couched in terms of the media hype that has surrounded the film in the past, suggesting that these press reports have a continuing impact on the reception of the film: both positively and negatively affecting the viewer's enjoyment.

More importantly, although viewers themselves construct the idea of 'preparation' as a way of avoiding extremes of affect, the anticipation of and preparation for their own potentially extreme response to the film acts as a cornerstone of contemporary viewing practices, forming an intrinsic part of the constitution of contemporary corporeal spectatorship. In this instance of course, the corporeal spectator is not simply an effect of discourse, rather viewers themselves become active agents in the formation of their own cinematic subjectivity. This subjectivity may be highly individual, multiple, even resistive, but as I have suggested it is always formed with respect to the prevailing discourses that surround both the film one is going to view, as well as cultural attitudes toward the 'appropriate' content of film more generally.

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[405] pgagliardi, 'IMDb user reviews'

Conclusion

As one cinema trailer, warning against the low quality of illegal copies of films, so succinctly declared: "Cinema. It's the experience that counts!"[406] And as I have tried to show in this chapter, the 'experience' is indeed absolutely central to contemporary cinema spectatorship. Drawing on some of the most successful contemporary films worldwide, I have sought to show that contemporary film not only seeks to deliver an experience for its viewer, but that experience takes a very specific form. Contemporary film seeks to address the viewer as a corporeal subject. Pleasure in popular film therefore, is rooted in the physicality of the experience: whether that is the thrill-ride of an action film, or having your skin crawl in a horror film.

Contemporary, popular Hollywood film then, has been shown to use its marketing to sell its films to its viewers as a source of physical excitement, kinetic effects and visceral experience, but this is no mere marketing promise. As we have seen very many viewers actively seek out the physical address that this kind of film offers, and treat it as the primary reason to see a film. These contemporary film viewers are therefore clearly entering into some form of corporeal spectatorship. However, what I have sought to demonstrate is that this form of spectatorship does not begin and end with the film text, as metapsychological theories would have us believe. Rather, the discourses that surround cinema, from the film posters and trailers to controversy in the press, form a very specific context within which the viewing of a film occurs. This, I have argued, does not only affect the way in which viewers *think* about a film, it is absolutely central to the constitution of the filmic experience. That is, these discourses build a sense of anticipation for the viewer and, either implicitly or explicitly, demand that the viewer prepare themselves for the intensity of the experience, particularly in the case of violent and horrific films. The anticipation of what a viewer is about to see not only raises levels of arousal, making certain film affects more likely to be effective, but as Hill points out, can actively work to change a viewer's perception of what they see on the screen to the extent that they 'imaginatively insert' images that do not appear on the screen.

The discourses surrounding the film can therefore build anticipation to the extent that the film text is perceptually modified by the viewer. But further,

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[406] *Cinema – It's the Experience that Counts - Narnia*, (UK: Buena Vista International, 2005)

the incitement to prepare oneself, either for viewing the film as a whole, or watching particular scenes within the film, demands that the viewer enters into a process of constructing a specific form of cinematic subjectivity, suitable to the specific address employed by these films. The incitement to prepare oneself, extolled by both film marketing and film viewers alike, suggests that engagement with a film does not begin and end with the text itself. Rather, that film marketing, as well as any further media attention, attempts to provoke a form of engagement with the film, or at the very least, the kind of experience it has to offer, before the viewer ever enters the cinema.

The marketing that surrounds the release of this kind of film then, may well be central to the success of the film's affects. But further, the type of campaign that insists that its viewer 'Get ready!' or 'Prepare yourself!' does not simply address the viewer as a corporeal subject and promise to deliver physical sensations and thrills in line with that mode of address. Rather, they actively encourage the viewer to enter into a particular mode of reception; to actively create themselves as corporeal subjects in order to fully appreciate the particular form of experiential address offered by the film.

The idea that the viewer might be transformed or permanently affected by the images s/he will see within the film is a case in point. That is, the suggestion that the film might have a lasting effect on the viewer, actively works to heighten the fear and anxiety of the viewer before they enter the cinema. The anticipation of a profound or extreme affect in this case means that the viewer may already be experiencing a degree of anxiety or tension with regard to what they are about to see, making scenes of peril, suspense or shock more likely to be effective within the cinema. Moreover, as Hill has demonstrated, viewers of these kinds of films take a significant degree of pleasure from being able to test their own boundaries with regard to the kinds of images and affects they can tolerate. In this instance, anticipation and preparation are absolutely crucial to this process, and therefore knowledge of the likely content and potential effects of watching such images, in terms of fear, disgust or shock, is therefore, an intrinsic part of the experience.

Films like *The Exorcist* and *Reservoir Dogs*[407] are clearly very different from films like *Twister* or *Die Hard,* and the particular form of spectatorship entered into within these films is clearly very specific to the content of the film and the intensity of the media debate surrounding their release. Nevertheless,

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[407] *Reservoir Dogs,* directed by Quentin Tarantino, (USA: Miramax Films, 1992)

what I am suggesting is that while these films mark the limits of acceptable cinema, their mode of address in unrelentingly visceral. As such, the processes and strategies adopted by viewers in response to these kinds of films shed light on the formation of corporeal spectatorship more generally, though it is important to acknowledge their specificity too.

In a very real sense films like *The Exorcist* and *Reservoir Dogs* not only tested the boundaries of those who watched them, but deliberately tested the limits of culturally acceptability within cinema at the time of their release. The value of these films however, is not simply in highlighting how a particular viewer might respond, or what strategies he or she might adopt when watching a film with an intense corporeal address. Rather, in situating itself at the limits of acceptability, it also helps us to delineate the limits of 'acceptable' cinematic subjectivity. That is, a film that is central to debates about the morality of violent or horrific imagery also entails significant debates about what is considered to be an 'appropriate' or normal response to such imagery, for example, whether or not it is normal or acceptable to enjoy or to be excited by images of rape or torture.

As I have already suggested, these discourses do more than help to create a corporeal subject equipped with a suitable mode of reception for a specific form of entertainment. Rather, these debates will delineate the limits of acceptable responses to images, as well as differentiate between the 'normal' and the 'abnormal' spectator. Corporeal spectatorship, therefore, is not an entirely 'free' activity, it is already shot through with power that attempts to both define and control it.

Fear of the Dark:

'Media Effects' and the Subjectification of Film Regulation

As Annette Kuhn points out in her book *Cinema, Censorship and Sexuality,1909-1925,* debates over film censorship are dominated by those who see it as a repressive act; an act of cutting out, of excision, of rejection, of exclusion, of freedom of expression undermined and of subjects forbidden. Within these debates, censorship is conceived as a problem, and questions revolve around "the extent to which prohibitions on the content of films constitute a justifiable exercise of power".[408] The problem with this 'prohibition model', Kuhn suggests, is twofold: firstly, it implies that censorship is an act carried out by a singular empowered person or institution; and secondly, it assumes that the process of censorship can only be conceived as a 'repressive' power. As such, the censor can never hold anything other than a negative relation to the rights and freedoms of others.

What Kuhn sets out to demonstrate is that the power to censor texts does not lie in the hands of a single public body, but rather the regulation of cinema takes place within the context of a network of relations between a number of interrelated, though frequently competing, institutions, practices and discourses. Or as Foucault might put it, the regulatory apparatus extends beyond any single institution to a "thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions,

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[408] Kuhn, (1988), 2

laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions".[409] As a result, Kuhn suggests the regulation of cinema should be understood "not so much as an imposition of rules upon some preconstituted entity, but as an ongoing and always provisional process of constituting objects from and for its own practices".[410] Censorship then is always a matter for debate, and what is considered appropriate or necessary censorship is always in tension. Though perhaps more importantly, the work of these regulatory discourses is never simply 'prohibitive' or 'repressive'. Rather, as Foucault suggests, power is always productive in its effects.

Indeed as both Annette Kuhn and Lee Grieveson argue in relation to early cinema, early debates on censorship were not only directed towards the "cultural control of cinema, on what could be shown", but frequently engaged with the question of "how cinema should function in the social body".[411] As a result these regulatory discourses not only worked to produce 'censorable texts' but in their treatment and handling of 'controversial' films during this period, regulatory bodies like the British Board of Film Censors (BBFC) in the UK, and the National Board of Censorship (NBC) in the US, worked to shape cinema in very specific ways.

For example, after a series of highly controversial films were released in the UK in the early 1910s, the BBFC chose to refuse all health education films a certificate, not because "such films might be 'indecorous', but because the cinema was…not a suitable place to air matters of potential controversy…Cinemas, in other words, were seen as exclusively for 'entertainment' films, and entertainment films were to be neither educational not controversial."[412] Similarly in the US, the NBC was forced to seriously reconsider its policy of promoting cinema as a site of public education after the release of two highly controversial 'white slave' films in 1913, to admit that the "lack of dialogue and emphasis on the dramatic" made film a "difficult medium" to achieve educative goals, and to conclude that cinemas were "primarily places of amusement and not of serious discussion and education".[413] This prompted the nascent American film industry to move away from the production of potentially controversial 'educational' films and focus instead on "the self-

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[409] Foucault, (1980), 194
[410] Kuhn, (1988), 7
[411] Lee Grieveson, *Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early Twentieth Century America*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 23
[412] Kuhn, (1988), 66
[413] Grieveson, (2004), 184

enclosed space of the fictive and the harmlessly 'entertaining'".[414]   As
Grieveson suggests, far from 'repressing' the film industry the regulatory
debates that unfolded in the early years of the twentieth century significantly
contributed to the American film industry's self-definition as a producer of
entertainment, and significantly shaped the development of the fictional,
narrative and ideological norms central to classical Hollywood cinema.

However, while the practices of these censorship bodies may well have
been 'productive' they were not exactly 'libertarian'. And although institutions
like the BBFC, the NBC and later, the Hays Office were set up in order to guard
against the threat of a heavy handed state censorship, the set of practices
adopted by these institutions "effected much more stringent controls over the
contents of films than any legislation directed specifically at indecent or obscene
publications could possibly have done".[415]

What I want to suggest in this thesis however, is that since the
breakdown of the Production Code in the US in the late 1960s, and coupled with
the development of 'new' technologies of distribution like video and the internet,
the regulation of contemporary cinema has undergone a kind of crisis. In the UK
this crisis can be clearly demonstrated in the unprecedented slew of legislation
passed by Parliament since the 1970s to regulate film works. But within an
Anglo-American context more generally, depictions of sex and violence formerly
prohibited under the Production Code have roused significant debate within the
public arena over how film ought to be regulated. As I will seek to show, the
agenda for this public debate has been more or less led by the findings of
'media effects' research, wherein concern over adult viewing has crystallized
around the potential harm caused by depictions of sexual, and sexualised
violence, particularly on young male viewers.

As a result the terms of the contemporary regulatory debate have
become ever more insistently focused on the film spectator as opposed to the
text. Though more importantly, within this discourse, the 'subject-spectator' has
been constructed in very particular ways. That is, the 'subject-spectator'
conceived within the 'media effects' tradition is not only thoroughly gendered,
but is constructed in profoundly physical and bodily terms. The regulatory
discourses of cinema, which include not only research on media effects, but
public debate about controversial films, therefore increasingly concern
themselves less with defining appropriate levels of explicitness within the text,

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[414] Grieveson, (2004), 184
[415] Kuhn, (1988), 18

and more with the definition of 'appropriate' spectatorial responses. The struggle for freedom of expression within contemporary cinema can therefore be seen to have shifted its locus from a conflict over the meaning or the acceptability of the text to a battle being fought over the body of the film spectator.

As such concern over 'media effects' has not only thoroughly problematised adult spectatorship, but as I hope to show, has led to an increasing subjectification of film regulation. Or as Foucault might put it, in the wake of increasing liberalisation, the regulatory discourses of contemporary cinema increasingly employ "new methods of power whose operation is ensured not by right but by technique, not by law but by normalisation, not by punishment but by control".[416] That is, in the discourses of contemporary cinema, relations of power concern themselves less with the justified excision of the image, and more with 'normalising' the responses and behaviour of the audience. As I will seek to show these 'normalising practices' take place not within the context of statutory regulation of cinema, but within public discussion of films by both critics and members of the public alike.

In order to explore the terms of this public discussion I have chosen to focus on the recent Australian independent film *Wolf Creek* The decision to study the reception of this film however, was prompted less by methodological concerns than by personal experience. The horrific nature of the film revolves around the torture and killing of two young women, and includes a protracted scene in which one of the women is threatened with sexual violence. In the UK the BBFC maintains a "hard line" on depictions of sexual violence on the grounds that:

> research into the effects of depictions of sexual violence…undertaken in the USA in the 1980s…[although] hotly disputed…is an area in which the evidence supporting the case for possible harm is unusually strong, and the BBFC continues to work on the assumption that particular violent scenes with the potential to trigger sexual arousal may encourage a harmful association between sexual violence and sexual gratification.[417]

Nevertheless, the film was passed by the Board without incident on both film and video, and was recently shown on late night UK domestic television in its entirety. While watching television as part of a mixed sex peer group, the showing of *Wolf Creek* on FilmFour was preceded by an announcement that

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[416] Foucault, (1990), 89
[417] British Board of Film Classification, *Annual Report 2003*, (London: BBFC, 2003), 74

viewers should be warned that the film contained scenes of sexual violence; the result was a look of horror that passed around the room before the host rose from his seat and switched the television off. Already in the process of writing about BBFC policies within the UK, what struck me about this event was that it represented a mundane, but very real act of censorship by an everyday group of people, who had evidently met with the limits of acceptability, at least within that particular context of reception.

Further investigation revealed that although the film was critically well received in many quarters and had been nominated for a host of awards internationally, including the Grand Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival, an award for best horror film by one of Britain's largest movie magazines, and no less than seven nominations from the Australian Film Institute, the theme of sexual violence that had motivated such a strong reaction within that small group had also generated significant debate amongst a wider film audience. And given the fact that the film had passed unproblematically through the classification and censorship process, the film proved to be a useful case study in which public debates about the 'acceptability' of such themes and depictions could be studied in a context that was distinct from 'official' regulatory debates over censorship. Moreover, although the threat of sexual violence is never actually carried out within the film, the threat itself is central to one of the key scenes within the film. As such, the film mobilises popular understandings of 'media effects', and allows us to explore the way in which the 'subject' of this kind of contemporary film is constructed by the public at large. In this sense, the film is particularly relevant within a British cultural context where debate about the potential 'harm' done to adult viewers by cinema crystallises around this issue.

What I will seek to demonstrate is that debate about the film within Anglo-American websites and forums circulates less around the content of the film per se and more around the reactions and responses of the film's audience. Calls for regulation within this context are highly unlikely to suggest the cutting or banning of the film, and instead focus on stigmatising viewers. The regulation of film in this sense becomes less about the excision or repression of texts, and more about the construction of normative categories of spectatorship. As a result the 'problem of cinema' within these debates becomes focussed on particular groups of spectators; it is a question of which subjects are viewing this kind of film. But moreover, these debates not only attempt to define the act of consumption of this problematic film text as a social and moral problem, but also

attempt to specify precisely how spectators should and should not respond. And while some contributors focus exclusively on defining appropriate standards of behaviour in face of the film, others concern themselves less with defining how one should 'act' and more with how one ought to 'feel'. As such we can clearly discern a public struggle to define a normative standard that seeks to prescribe 'appropriate' affective relations to such films. And further, as we shall see, there is clear evidence that individual viewers not only construct themselves as subjects of this discourse, but that they can and do internalise these normative standards. Film regulation in this sense has become subjectified, whereby subjects produce their own pleasures and affective relations to a text in the context of these normalising discourses, and understand them as socially problematic.

Contemporary British Law

As writers like Graham Murdock[418] and Geoffrey Pearson[419] have shown, the fear that watching certain kinds of film will lead young men into violence and crime, or otherwise cause them 'harm' is nothing new. Indeed, what they set out to demonstrate is that the journalists caught up in a succession of 'moral panics' about film in recent British history have done little more that reiterate the fears and anxieties that have circulated widely throughout the course of the twentieth century. The 'video nasties' debacle in the early 1980s is a case in point. In this instance, a group of very loosely defined 'video nasties', consisting mostly of low-budget American and Italian horror films, including *I Spit on Your Grave*,[420] *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*[421] and *The Toolbox Murders*[422] which relied heavily on the presentation of horror and graphic violence, provoked outrage within the British tabloid press. Concern circulated around the potential of these (as yet) unregulated videos to fall into the hands of children and young people leading inexorably, it was asserted, to an increase in violent crime.

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[418] Murdock, (2001)

[419] Geoffrey Pearson, 'Falling Standards: a short sharp history of moral decline', *The Video Nasties: Freedom and Censorship in the Media*, ed. Martin Barker, (London: Pluto Press, 1984)

[420] *I Spit On Your Grave*, directed by Meir Zarchi, (USA: Cinemagic, 1978)

[421] *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, directed by Tobe Hooper, (USA: Bryanston Distributing, 1974)

[422] *The Toolbox Murders*, directed by Dennis Donnelly, (USA: Cal-Am Releasing, 1978)

The 'moral panic' initiated with the aid of the British press over the effects of these videos on the nation's youth led directly to the introduction of the Video Recordings Act in 1984. The Act granted the BBFC statutory powers for the first time in its history and required the Board to make classification and censorship decisions with "special regard to the likelihood of video works being viewed in the home"[423] as well as to consider whether the particular film was "suitable for viewing by persons who have not attained a particular age".[424] For while the cinema box office had functioned as a statutory age bar since the passing of the *Cinematograph Act* in 1952,[425] the same could not be guaranteed within the unregulated space of the home; especially, it was argued, within working-class homes.[426]

The Video Recordings Act therefore placed the possibility of children viewing works intended for an adult audience right at the heart of the BBFC's regulatory agenda and as a result the BBFC was legally required to make much stricter regulatory decisions with regard to video works than it did for films shown within the cinema. For although the effects of films on children's "health, intelligence and morals"[427] had been an explicit cause for concern from the earliest days of cinema, since the introduction of the category X in 1951 which excluded those under 16 the BBFC had sought to judge works aimed at an adult audience on the grounds of whether it was "likely to impair the moral standards of the public", and more importantly, whether it was "likely to give offence to reasonably minded cinema audiences".[428] Moreover, the remarkably illiberal redefinition of the audience contained in the Video Recordings Act, flew in the face of the far more progressive definition contained in the Obscene Publications Act,[429] which had been extended to cover film just seven years previously.

The Obscene Publications Act itself overturned the 1868 legal precedent set by *Regina v Hicklin* in which the test of obscenity was "whether the tendency of the matter charged as obscenity is to deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences, and into whose hands a publication of this sort may fall."[430] Such a test rested on the perceived effects of any given work

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[423] *Video Recordings Act,* sec. 4(1)(a)
[424] *Video Recordings Act,* sec. 4(3)(b)
[425] *Cinematograph Act,* (London: HMSO, 1952)
[426] Petley, (2001)
[427] Kuhn, (1988), 121
[428] 'History of the BBFC – 1912-1949', *SBBFC: Students' British Board of Film Classification*, http://www.sbbfc.co.uk/student_guide_history1912.asp, (accessed 4th Jul 2008)
[429] *Obscene Publications Act,* (London: HMSO, 1959/1964)
[430] *Regina v. Hicklin*, (1868) 3 L.R.-Q.B. 360

on the most vulnerable members of society, regardless of whether they were ever likely to encounter it. By contrast, the 1959 Act rejected "the 'most vulnerable person' standard of *Hicklin,* with its preoccupation with those members of society of the lowest level of intellectual or moral discernment."[431] Instead, a work was only to be considered obscene if "its effect…is, if taken as a whole, such as to tend to deprave and corrupt persons who are likely…to read, see or hear the matter contained or embodied in it".[432] This crucial rewording of the obscenity test demanded that any jury must take account of the effect on the "'likely' rather than 'conceivably possible' readership".[433] As such, the Obscene Publications Act pushed the definition of the audience beyond that of the 'reasonably minded' general public, and inscribed instead the very specific target audience for the work. Thereafter, as Robertson and Nicol put it, a work of literature was "to be judged by its effect on serious-minded purchasers, a comic book by its effect on children, a sexually explicit magazine sold in an 'adults only' bookstore by its effect on the adult patrons of that particular shop."[434]

Far from the media literate, genre-specific consumer of the Obscene Publications Act, or even the 'reasonably minded' audience at the centre of the BBFC's policies during Arthur Watkins tenure as Secretary, the 'potential' audience for video works inscribed in the Video Recordings Act was discursively constructed as a child who was 'vulnerable' in face of the image, 'deficient' in their ability to understand or to cope with what they see, and to otherwise lack critical or rational faculties.[435] Moreover, while it had been common practice for the BBFC to classify films prior to their release, until the passing of the Video Recordings Act the arrangement had been voluntary one. Unlike the Obscene Publications Act which was used to prosecute publications which were in circulation, the Video Recordings Act passed a system of prior restraint into law, effectively "saving police the trouble of submitting films to juries who may take a different view of what adults are entitles to watch in the privacy of their own homes."[436]

Indeed, although the extension of the Obscene Publications Act ostensibly broadened British legislative control over film content, the inclusion of

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[431] Geoffrey Robertson and Andrew Nicol, *Media Law*, 5th Edition, (London: Penguin, 2008), 201
[432] *Obscene Publications Act*, sec. 1(1)
[433] Robertson and Nicol, (2008), 201
[434] Robertson and Nicol, (2008), 201
[435] See David Gauntlett, "'Ten things wrong with the 'effects model''", *Approaches to Audiences – A Reader*, ed. Roger Dickinson, Ramaswani Harindranath and Olga Linné, (London: Arnold, 1998)
[436] Robertson and Nicol, (2008), 839

film within the Act was not intended to stem the flow, or even to provide legislative validation for the censorship of provocative films. On the contrary, the Act specifically protected works that may otherwise be considered to be obscene, provided that they could be proven to be "for the public good".[437] The decision to include film works within the Act was therefore taken in order to defend 'serious' or 'artistic' films against the threat of private prosecutions, and ironically, allowed the BBFC to relax its policies. Furthermore, the extension of the Act, coupled with a more general shift in the application of indecency laws to take account of the 'work as a whole',[438] compelled the BBFC to change the way in which it handled controversial material. While the Board had previously considered particular scenes within films on the basis of whether they could be deemed indecent, this legislative framework allowed the BBFC far more latitude when deciding whether films featuring graphic nudity, for example, could be passed uncut.

The Board's regulatory practices also began to mirror the legislative definition of obscenity insofar as material was no longer considered to be 'inherently obscene', rather its obscenity could only be judged by its tendency to corrupt its audience. As a result, the BBFC's classificatory decisions shifted in emphasis, from a consideration of the explicitness of the image to a judgement about the potential effects of the work, as a whole, on the spectator. However, while this shift may well be interpreted as a remarkable liberalisation of the BBFC's regulatory practices in 1977, under the auspices of the Video Recordings Act the question of the effect upon the potential viewer, who is defined in terms of their vulnerability, ceases to be a liberating one.

While the passing of the Video Recordings Act temporarily assuaged the pro-censorship campaigners, the 'video nasties' debate re-emerged a decade later in the wake of the murder of the toddler James Bulger in Feb 1993 by two ten year old boys. Summing up the case at the end of the boys' trial, the presiding judge suggested that the boys' crime could be at least partly explained by their exposure to violent videos. Although video violence had never been discussed at the trial, and despite a dearth of evidence, the UK press claimed that the crime was almost exclusively attributable to the fact that the two boys had watched *Child's Play 3.*[439] The case reinvigorated public concern over 'media effects' and led directly to the strengthening of the Video Recordings Act.

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[437] Obscene Publications Act, sec. 4(1)
[438] *Att-Gen, ex rel. McWhirter v IBA,* (1973) Q.B. 629, especially at 659, cited in Robertson and Nicol, (2008), 240
[439] *Child's Play 3*, directed by Jack Bender, (USA: Universal Pictures, 1991)

The amendment required the BBFC to take particular account of the "harm that may be caused to potential viewers or through their behaviour, to society".[440] A test of 'harm' which for the first time enshrined in law the idea promoted by 'media effects' research, that watching certain kinds of films can directly damage a viewer and/or be causally linked to anti-social behaviour.

Moreover, since this time the findings of the 'media effects' canon have become central to the BBFC's definition of 'harm'. In Feb 2008 for example, the Board rejected the US 'torture porn' film *Murder Set Pieces*[441] for video release. And in their notice of rejection the BBFC specifically cite the findings of the 'media effects' researchers as the basis of that decision "current Classification Guidelines, published in 2005…reflect the balance of media effects research…that scenes of violence with the potential to trigger sexual arousal may encourage a harmful association between violence and sexual gratification."[442] As this example clearly demonstrates, the decision to effectively ban this film from the UK video market is not founded on the explicitness, the offensiveness or even the morality of the text, but around received models of spectatorship, formulated within the 'media effects' tradition, in which the spectator is frequently constructed as 'vulnerable' and in need of protection. In relation to specific research on the effects of viewing sexual violence, on the other hand the spectator is more regularly constructed as potentially 'deviant' and/or 'criminal', and in need of regulation and control.

This idea that the consumption of certain kinds of images may lead to 'deviancy' and crime, a notion that has by no means been proven by 'media effects' research, not only lies at the root of the statutory definition of 'harm', but recently formed the basis of a law designed to criminalise the consumption of 'extreme' pornography. The Criminal Justice and Immigration Act which came into effect in May 2008, made it "an offence for a person to be in possession of an extreme pornographic image".[443] The law was prompted by the trial of Graham Coutts for the murder of Jane Longhurst in 2003, where the prosecution placed a great deal of emphasis on the discovery of a large number of violent pornographic images on Coutts' computer. Although no evidence was presented to prove a causal link between his consumption of these images and the murder of Jane Longhurst, the prosecution contended that this material had

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[440] Video Recordings Act, sec. 4A(1)
[441] *Murder Set Pieces*, directed by Nick Palumbo, (USA: TLA Releasing, 2008)
[442] 'Murder Set Pieces', *British Board of Film Classification*, http://www.bbfc.co.uk/website/Classified.nsf/0/C459C3DC24C72664802573FC005EB482, (accessed 8th May 2008)
[443] *Criminal Justice and Immigration Act*, (London: HMSO, 2008), sec. 63(1)

"'fostered' his bizarre and macabre fantasies", prompting Jane's mother to lead a campaign "to close down or filter out these pornographic sites, so that people like Jane's killer may no longer feed their sick imaginations and do harm to others".[444]

Like the Video Recordings Act before it, this legislation is clearly born out of public anxiety about the unregulated circulation of images, facilitated by the development of 'new' technologies, despite the fact that distribution of 'hard-core' and 'illegal' pornography predates the development of both the internet and video tape. Indeed as Julian Petley points out, in the early 1970's a large number of 8mm films were sold via mail order and under the counter in Soho and East End sex shops. Moreover, such films were not restricted to the UK's flourishing black market. Until 1982 a loophole in British law allowed a limited range of pornography to be screened in private cinema clubs, always assuming that such films did not contravene laws of obscenity or indecency.[445] Nevertheless, despite the fact that it was already illegal to publish such material under the Obscene Publications Act, "the global nature of the Internet means that it is very difficult to prosecute those responsible who are mostly operating from abroad" making it necessary to "take a different approach",[446] in which it is the consumer rather than the producer or distributor of 'extreme' pornography who is criminalised.

Debates about how we might define 'extreme' pornography, and growing concern about the impact of such this law on minority sexual practices notwithstanding, the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act is symbolic of a more general shift within UK regulatory policy. On the one hand, it is indicative of an institutional acceptance of 'media effects' based models of 'harm'. But more important for our discussion here, it also represents a significant refocusing of the regulatory agenda in which there is an increasing intensification and insistence on the regulation and control of the spectator as opposed to the text.

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[444] 'UK police seek web porn crackdown', *BBC News*, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/3460855.stm, (accessed 3rd Jul 2008)
[445] Julian Petley, 'There's Something About Mary…'. *British Stars and Stardom: From Alma Taylor to Sean Connery*, ed. Bruce Babington, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001)
[446] Home Office and Scottish Executive, *Consultation: On the possession of extreme pornographic material*, (London: HMSO, Aug 2005), 1

The question of 'harm'

These concerns of course, are not unique to Britain. In the US many reporters attempted to explain the Columbine High School Massacre by pointing to films like *The Matrix* and *The Basketball Diaries*[447], as well as the music of artists like Marilyn Manson, and violent video games like the first-person shooter DOOM.[448] Like the Bulger case, it was never clear whether the boys who carried out the shootings had even seen the films singled out for speculation. But even if they had, as Karen Boyle argues, "there is no inherent reason for these particular aspects of the boys' lives to have come under such intense scrutiny".[449] For Graham Murdock, this practice of generalising from single cases has a long history. However, as he suggests the moral panics sparked by such tragic and newsworthy events tell us less about the motives or chain of events that might have led to such a tragedy, than it does about the latent social fears and concerns of the culture in which they occur.[450]

In the 1980s and 1990s, the American public struggled with the issues of the 'harm' that may be caused by the rising wave of sex and violence found on the screen. US 'media effects' research boomed, and public concern over the effects of such films on the viewer proliferated, strengthening the demands of feminists like Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon for the right of women to sue producers and distributors of pornography on the grounds that they had been harmed by it. The Ordinance proposed by Dworkin and MacKinnon in Minneapolis in 1983[451] was tabled in a number of cities around the US, and briefly became law in Indianapolis, before it was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. However, in 1992 the Pornography Victims' Compensation Act[452] reiterated many of the concerns of the Minneapolis Ordinance. The Act proposed that those involved in the business of making and selling pornography ought to be held responsible for "any sexual offense determined by a court to have been a major cause (or motivating factor) for a sex offender's actions".[453]

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[447] *The Basketball Diaries*, directed by Scott Kalvert, (USA: New Line Cinema, 1995)
[448] *Doom*, (USA: id Software, 1993)
[449] Karen Boyle, *Media and Violence: Gendering the Debates*, (London: Sage, 2005), 5
[450] Murdock, (2001), 158
[451] Minneapolis City Council, 'Transcript of the Public Hearings on Ordinances to Add Pornography as Discrimination Against Women: Dec 12th and 13th 1983', in *Pornography and Sexual Violence: Evidence of the Links*, (London: Everywoman, 1988)
[452] *Pornography Victims' Compensation Act,* S.1521, 102d Cong., 2d Sess. (1992)
[453] Naomi B. McCormick, *Sexual Salvation: Affirming Women's Sexual Rights and Pleasures*, (Westport, Conneticut: Praeger Publishers, 1994), 153

Although the Act was quashed before ever reaching the statute books, it nevertheless demonstrated a continuing public concern for the harm that may be caused by pornography within the US.

Indeed the question of 'harm' has been central to US obscenity law since the ruling of *Paris Adult Theatre I v. Slaton* in 1973. Here the US Supreme Court upheld the State of Georgia's right to prevent the showing of obscene material within an adult theatre on the grounds that such material was not protected under the First Amendment on the grounds that there was a 'possible' connection between the circulation of obscene material and "antisocial behaviour". Although the Supreme Court admitted that evidence of a link between the two was inconclusive, it ruled that the State itself should be able to decide on the question of whether "commerce in obscene books, or public exhibitions focused on obscene conduct, have a tendency to exert a corrupting and debasing impact leading to antisocial behaviour".[454] It also cited evidence that "While erotic stimulation caused by pornography may be legally insignificant in itself, there are medical experts who believe that such stimulation frequently manifests itself in criminal sexual behavior or other antisocial conduct."[455] In a similar way to the regulation of works within the UK, despite the fact that this case considered obscenity in the context of a cinema aimed exclusively at an adult audience and effectively policed by a box office, it did not construct the spectator as a reasonable and rational adult. Instead, with its insistent focus on the 'stimulation' of the subject by pornography and/or obscenity, and the possibility of 'adverse effects' it posited a spectator who is acted upon by a text; 'subjected' to it in a way that is quite outside of his/her control intellectually, critically or morally. And further, it formulated a model of the spectator who is deemed on the one hand to be 'vulnerable' to the 'adverse effects' of pornography, and on the other, potentially 'deviant' or 'criminal' and in need of regulation and control.

By the time of the Meese Commission in 1986, which argued for the strengthening of the obscenity laws in the US, the concern about 'harm' had become increasingly focussed on the issue of sexual violence. The Report suggested that although there was still some debate about the potential harm that may be caused by sexually explicit materials, they could not be considered to be harmful on the grounds of their explicitness. Indeed the Commission unanimously agreed that 'non-violent' and 'non-degrading' materials were "little

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[454] *Paris Adult Theatre I v. Slaton*, 413 U.S. 49, (1973), para. 63
[455] *Paris Adult Theatre I v. Slaton*, footnote 8

cause for concern if not made available to children [or]…foisted on unwilling viewers."[456] Materials containing depictions of sexual violence on the other hand, were treated very differently. The Commission concluded that "the available evidence strongly supports the hypothesis that substantial exposure to sexually violent materials as described here bears a causal relationship to antisocial acts of sexual violence and, for some subgroups, possibly to unlawful acts of sexual violence".[457] These findings were scarcely supported by research. Indeed the Commission conceded that the research evidence could only demonstrate a link between exposure to sexually violent material and aggressive behaviour, whereas "finding a link between aggressive behavior towards women and sexual violence…requires assumptions not found exclusively in the experimental evidence. We see no reason, however, not to make these assumptions"[458] Moreover, the Commission's condemnation did not stop at obscene works, or even films depicting graphic scenes of sexual violence. Rather it was suggested that "the so-called "slasher" films…are likely to produce the consequences discussed here to a greater extent than most of the materials available in "adults only" pornographic outlets."[459]

Although 'media effects' researchers themselves might dispute whether watching a 'slasher' film might lead directly to sexual assault, the Commission's findings that these films might prove harmful, was not without precedent. Dr Edward Donnerstein, a central figure within 'media effects' research, had previously given evidence in support of the Minneapolis Ordinance in 1983 where he raised concern over a number of R-rated films, including *I Spit on Your Grave, The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *The Toolbox Murders* all of which had been central to the 'video nasties' debate in the UK. For Donnerstein the central problem with these movies was that:

> Every time a woman is killed it has a sexual overtone. It is to get the audience sexually aroused…there is nothing wrong with sexual explicitness. What is wrong is…it is in juxtaposition with some of the graphic violence…And yes, young males will become sexually aroused with the images. If you remove the sexual context, unfortunately they will become aroused by the violence.[460]

[456] Edwin Meese, *Attorney General's Commission on Pornography: Final Report*, (Washington D.C.: US Department of Justice, July 1986), sec. 5.2.3
[457] Meese, (1986), sec. 5.2.1
[458] Meese, (1986), sec. 5.2.1
[459] Meese, (1986), sec. 5.2.1
[460] Pornography and Sexual Violence: Evidence of the Links, (1988), 20

For Donnerstein the problem with such films is not the level of explicitness within the text, but the association between sex and violence. More specifically, that young men will become sexually aroused whilst watching violent images, leading to a situation in which these young men are 'conditioned' to become sexually aroused by violence. The young male viewers referred to here are constructed as being passively and unwittingly subjected to a text that conditions them to respond to violence, despite the fact that Donnerstein provides no evidence that this actually occurs, and nor, to my knowledge has 'media effects' research more generally shown this to be the case. Nevertheless, Donnerstein puts aside any notion that the viewers of these films might be able to respond critically or rationally to these films, let alone actively resist the ideological messages contained within them. While this approach is not uncommon within 'media effects' research, these formulations of spectator-text relations take place within the context of a significant power relationship in which the research subject has little control over or even input into the interpretation of the findings.

The problem of 'media effects'

As the preceding discussion of 'harm' suggests, the question of media effects is inextricably bound up with politics on both sides of the Atlantic. And as cases like that of James Bulger and the Columbine High School massacre demonstrate, the question of media violence is often central to the debate over these high profile crimes. However plausible these links might seem, investigations within the UK have consistently failed to find any evidence of a link,[461] leading critics like David Buckingham and Karen Boyle to suggest that politician's complicity in perpetuating this kind of moral panic represents a way of avoiding having to deal with the very real social problems that may lie at the heart of such crimes.

Moreover, Buckingham argues that it is important to remember that it is not simply that politicians make dubious use of highly questionable evidence, but that the research itself is inevitably influenced by the political climate in

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[461] Guy Cumberbatch, *"Video Violence: Villain or Victim?"* (London: Video Standards Council, 2004), 34-35

which it is produced. The "kinds of research that are funded, the kinds of questions that are addressed, and hence the kinds of evidence that are available"[462] are all shaped by the social and historical context and the prevailing public anxieties in circulation at the time. In broad terms, moral panics of the kind outlined above lead researchers to question 'what does media do to people?', or at the very least it leads moral entrepreneurs to seek out studies that ask this kind of question. From a Cultural Studies perspective however, these studies take the wrong approach. Our understanding of media influence would be better served by a focus on 'what do people do with media?'

While a thorough review of all 'media effects' studies is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is pertinent here to highlight some of the more profound weaknesses in the evidence presented by this body of research. For as the somewhat unfounded conclusions of the Meese Commission suggest, "so often is the possibility – or rather, supposed *likelihood* – of television", and media more generally, "having direct effects pushed into the public eye that it can seem naïve, even perverse, to argue against the contention."[463] Despite the long history of effects research however, the evidence remains at best inconclusive.[464] As David Buckingham suggests, far-reaching claims are often made on the basis of limited evidence and studies often contradict one another.[465] Though after a comprehensive review of the literature authors like Jonathan Freedman have concluded unequivocally that "the scientific evidence does not support" the hypothesis that "media violence causes aggression".[466]

Nevertheless, effects studies have focussed predominantly on trying to establish a direct causal link between media exposure and the particular behavioural or attitudinal effects they are testing for. Crudely framed, research studies often rely on a classic behaviourist model which conceives of spectator-text relations as a simple question of stimulus and response. As a result, effects research has consistently neglected the social factors that might underpin the commissioning of a crime. And further, Boyle argues that by framing interpersonal violence in terms of cause and effect in this way, research not only ignores the fact that individuals make active choices about how they behave, but

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[462] David Buckingham, *The Impact of the Media on Children and Young People*, (London: Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2007), 9
[463] David Gauntlett, *Moving Experiences: Understanding Television's Influences and Effects,* (London: John Libbey and Company Ltd, 1995)
[464] Jib Fowles, *The Case for Television Violence*, (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, 1999)
[465] Buckingham, (2007), 21
[466] Jonathan L. Freedman, *Media Violence and its Effect on Aggression: Assessing the Scientific Evidence*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 210

it also suggests individuals are not entirely accountable for their actions.[467] For Boyle, this forms part of a wider problem in which the mobilisation of debates over media effects provides a way of excusing male violence against women. Although the cause and effect logic of much effects research may simply be indicative of behaviourism's overly simplistic and reductionist approach to the social world, and as such, it is imperative that we challenge the basic theoretical assumptions that underpin this research. That is, we must question how both 'stimulus' and 'response' are conceived within such studies.

In the first instance, researchers often present the stimulus material, 'violence' or 'pornography', as though these were self-evident and objective categories, free from the value judgement of the researchers. Many studies simply do not explain what is meant by violence, or what kind of media violence was used in the process of the research, and it is simply assumed that the participants, not to mention the reader, share their perception and definition of the material under scrutiny. However, work by Morrison and Millwood suggests that definitions of what counts as 'violence' on the screen will vary, at least in part, depending on the life experience of the individual.[468] As a result, we have reasonable grounds to question what interpretations and assumptions researchers bring to bear on ill-defined categories such as 'pornography'. As Boyle suggests "in the studies most often cited in the pornography debates…the terms 'pornographic', 'erotic', 'obscene', 'sexually arousing', and 'sexually' explicit' are used interchangeably to refer to a diverse set of representations, from nudity to sexual activity between consenting adults and scenes of sexualised mutilation".[469]

In studies of screen violence, this kind of gross over-simplifications can lead to a total elision of the question of context. Within those studies that conduct content analyses for example, there is an assumption that violence is a simple category with a singular fixed meaning that can ultimately be quantified. As Barker argues, such approaches neglect issues how such violence is represented, who commits it, what their motivations are, who it is perpetrated against and why.[470] Indeed some studies neglect even the most basic issues of genre, leading to definitions of violence that are so broad that they make programmes like *Tom and Jerry* appear to be one of the most violent shows on

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[467] Boyle, (2005), 17
[468] David Morrison and Andrea Millwood Hargrave, 'The Meaning and Definition of Violence', *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics, Vol.*3, No.3, (2007)
[469] Boyle, (2005), 19
[470] Barker, 'The Newson Report: a case study in "common sense"', in Barker and Petley, (2001)

television.[471] As a result, Barker and Petley suggest that "claims about the possible 'effects of violent media' are not just false, they range from the daft to the mischievous…different kinds of media use different kinds of 'violence' for different purposes… without asking where, when and in what context are they used…it is stupid simply to ask 'what are the effects of violence?"[472]

But while on the one hand definitions of what counts as violence appear so broad that it seems to encompass depictions that are of little or no concern to the public at large, on the other hand this same set of studies appear remarkably specific in their focus on fictional violence. As Gauntlett points out, the range of violent acts that are featured in news programmes is almost always exempt from criticism. Condemnation of screen violence, it would seem, is reserved for those genres whose purpose is to entertain rather than edify, despite the obvious fallacy of assuming that depictions fictional violence and depictions of violence on the news will differ in their effects.

In the second instance, it is also important to question how such studies conceive of the issue of 'response'. As I have already suggested, effects research very often assumes its subjects to be passive and uncritical. This often leads researchers to assume that while children are inherently 'vulnerable', other groups of viewers are potentially dangerous, and might be led to commit violent and/or sexual offences simply by virtue of witnessing them on the screen. Research suggests however, that this is simply not the case. Buckingham for example has shown that children are in fact remarkably sophisticated in their handling of media texts.[473] Similarly, work by Barker et al, which will be addressed more fully later in this chapter, suggests that viewers of sexual violence bring a range of interpretations to bear on what they see, and in the process create a variety of ways in which these texts might be understood.[474] Indeed as Gauntlett so succinctly puts it:

> Since the effects model rides roughshod over both the
> meanings that actions have for characters in dramas and the
> meanings which those depicted acts may have for the
> audience members, it can retain little credibility with those who
> consider popular entertainment to be more than just a set of

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[471] Guy Cumberbatch and Dennis Howitt, *A Measure of Uncertainty: The Effects of Mass Media*, (London: John Libbey and Company Ltd, 1989)
[472] Barker and Petley, (2001), 1-2
[473] See for example, David Buckingham, *Moving Images: Understanding Children's Emotional Responses to Television* , (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996)
[474] Martin Barker, Ernest Mathijs, Jamie Sexton, Kate Egan, Russ Hunter and Melanie Selfe, *Audiences and Receptions of Sexual Violence in Contemporary Cinema*, (London: BBFC, 2007), http://www.bbfc.co.uk/downloads/pub/Policy%20and%20Research/Audiences%20and%20Receptions%20of%20Sexual%20Violence%20in%20Contemporary%20Cinema.pdf ,(accessed 24th April 2009)

> very basic propaganda messages flashed at the audience in the simplest possible terms.[475]

In the case of adults, this characterisation of the act of viewing leading directly to the commissioning of violent or sexually abusive crimes suggests that the only barrier to the perpetration of these crimes is either knowledge, (in the case of theories of imitation), or the lack of suitably stimulating material, (in the theories of arousal). Theories of arousal in particular, are significantly at odds with research into actual cases of rape, where the crime is found to be "motivated more by retaliatory and compensatory motives than sexual ones; it is a pseudosexual act…addressing issues of hostility (anger) and control (power) more than desire (sexuality)."[476] As such, these theories not only neglect the issue of providing the viewer with an actual motive for such a crime, but they also ignore the many other social barriers to committing an act of interpersonal violence. Indeed, effects research has itself shown that post-exposure debriefing sessions can not only significantly ameliorate desensitisation and/or attitudinal effects produced by the research, but can lead to greater sensitivity to issues of rape.[477] Taken at face value this undermines the premise that watching sexual or sexualised violence on screen causes harmful effects in any simple way, and suggests instead that interpretations of these depictions are profoundly influenced by the social and ideological climate in which they are viewed. In which case, the question becomes less about the regulation of film works, and more about the information and attitudes that circulate within our culture more generally.

However, these results might also suggest a more general problem with effects research insofar as laboratory based experiments contain 'demand characteristics' which present the participant with a defined role to play. In this respect, Cumberbatch recounts the tale of "one shrewd four year old who, arriving at the laboratory for a modelling experiment, was heard to whisper to her mother "Look Mummy! There's the doll we have to hit!"[478] As Cumberbatch suggests, "if four year olds can guess what an experimenter wants them to do" then one needs to ask serious questions about whether adult participant may also "behave as 'good' participants, providing the experimenter only with the

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[475] Gauntlett, (2005), 151
[476] Ann Wolbert Burgess and Lynda Holmstrom, *Rape: Crisis and Recovery,* (Maryland: Brady, 1979), 23, quoted in Cumberbatch and Howitt, (1989), 71
[477] For a review and discussion see Edward Donnerstein, Daniel Linz and Steven Penrod, *The Question of Pornography: Research Findings and Policy Implications*, (London: Collier MacMillan, 1987)
[478] Cumberbatch, (2004), 28

results they think s/he wants", a result which is "arguably more likely with controversial and well publicised issues such as video violence."[479] Similarly, Howitt suggests that questionnaires designed to test the effects of pornography and/or sexual violence on an individual's attitudes may also be subject to this kind of 'research demand'. That is, the simple act of showing a pornographic film fundamentally changes the context in which subjects are being asked to respond. It may not be that the pornography itself changed attitudes, but rather showing this kind of film may change subject's perceptions of what the researcher wants. However, we might also consider the possibility that viewing pornography in this kind of setting may simply suspend the rules of everyday 'polite' society and allow participants to reflect of their experiences differently, or to present themselves more honestly.[480]

What these issues suggest is that while laboratory based studies may be among the most influential in policy debates over the regulation of pornography and violence,[481] the artificial character of these studies means that they lack 'ecological validity'. The kinds of texts encountered, as well as the manner of presentation is unlikely to be representative of what subjects would choose to view outside the lab, or the way media texts may be used in more natural settings. As Boyle notes, "being wired up to a machine measuring physiological aspects of arousal is hardly equivalent to an orgasm in the privacy of your home…Effects research cannot account for how participants make sense of what they see…and why they choose to engage – or not – with specific media texts."[482] Similarly, the artificial nature of the most common test for aggression, namely giving another party an electric shock within a laboratory setting, leads one to seriously question whether those studies that report increases in aggression in response to viewing violence can be applied to behaviour in the outside world. As Howitt observes, choosing to administer an electric shock to a woman who has usually deliberately annoyed you in the context of a laboratory, is rather different to an act of sexual assault. Indeed as Boyle notes, in the real world acts of violence not only have myriad consequences for both the victim and the perpetrator, but individuals also have a range of more or less legitimate ways of dealing with their aggression, like phoning a friend or hitting a pillow, which are simply not available to them in the laboratory.

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[479] Cumberbatch, (2004), 30
[480] Cumberbatch and Howitt, (1989), 74
[481] Boyle, (2005), 16
[482] Boyle, (2005), 18

A further weakness in the behaviourist model is that it fails to account for the psychological processes that lie behind particular behaviours.[483] This presents a particular problem in instances where the researcher's concern to demonstrate desensitisation or attitudinal effects means that their conclusions may completely cut across alternative explanations for the subjects' responses. For example, Howitt discusses research conducted by Zillman and Bryant on the effects of watching pornography on 'sexual callousness'.[484] Howitt suggests that while these researchers claim that the lowering of a subject's support for the Women's Liberation Movement after viewing pornography is indicative of a more general increase in 'sexual callousness', they wholly neglect the possibility that subject's lower support might be because the films were not as extreme as feminist campaigners had led them to believe.

Similarly a study by Linz, Donnerstein and Penrod[485] claimed to show that viewing sexualised violence in R-rated films led to a desensitisation toward rape and violence. The researchers suggested that after watching 10 hours of feature films subjects reported feeling less anxious, seeing less 'offensive scenes' within the films, perceived the films to be 'less graphic and gory', and by the last day "men were rating the material as significantly less debasing and degrading to women, more humorous, more enjoyable, and claimed a greater willingness to see this type of film again".[486] These findings were construed as evidence that the subjects had become desensitised, however what the researchers claim to be evidence of harm may just as easily be interpreted as the men's growing familiarity with the specific narrative conventions that define the genre of the films they saw. But by wholly ignoring the subjects' own interpretations of the films, and refusing any account of their own responses, these researchers simply treat these viewers as passive and ignorant victims.

BBFC Regulations

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[483] Cumberbatch and Howitt, (1989), 49
[484] Dolf Zillman and Jennings Bryant, 'Pornography Sexual Callousness and the Trivialisation of Rape', *Journal of Communications*, Vol.32, No.4 (Autumn 1982)
[485] Daniel Linz, Edward Donnerstein and Steven Penrod, 'Effects of long-term exposure to violent and sexually degrading depictions of women', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 55, no.5, (Nov 1988)
[486] Donnerstein and Linz, (1998), 188

Despite the inconclusive character of the evidence presented by media effects research, and the somewhat dubious nature of at least some of their findings, the media effects canon still holds sway over the regulatory decisions of the BBFC in the UK. The BBFC formally recognises that "adults should as far as possible be free to choose what they see, providing that it remains within the law and is not potentially harmful to society".[487] However, the definition of 'harm' that is enshrined in UK law under the Video Recordings Act makes clearly draws on media effects research. As the BBFC regularly point out in their rejection notices "harm is not to be interpreted narrowly as behavioural harm, but may also include more insidious risks, and the Board follows this approach in having regard to, for instance, moral harm and possible desensitisation."[488] As a result, the Board maintain a 'hard line' on depictions of sexual violence specifically because the findings of "researchers such as Donnerstein, Linz, Malamuth, Check, Zillman, Bryant, Berkowitz and Burt",[489] which although they are "hotly disputed" nevertheless present an "unusually strong" "case for possible harm".[490] Or as Robin Duvall (the former Director of the BBFC) put it in a lecture given in Feb 2001, "we reject material which endorses the old male 'women like it really' rape myth. One of the reasons we do this is because of the research evidence that that is what turns some men on."[491] Chief amongst the 'more carefully designed studies' in Duvall's view is the "evidence from American social scientists - Donnerstein, Linz, Penrod, Malamuth - that violent pornography and "'X' rated videos in which the woman is shown enjoying the assault or rape" excite aggressive responses from some male viewers."[492] While Duvall expressed misgivings about the possibility of ever finding a definitive answer to the media effects debates within his lecture, he nevertheless suggested that there may well be a significant link between viewing sexually violent material and the aggressive responses and/or sexual arousal of some of those watching.

This 'strict policy' on the treatment of sexual violence goes hand in hand with the BBFC's increasingly liberal treatment of sex within narrative film. An increasing tolerance for sexually explicit works is, of course, part of a more general trend that began in the 1970s, where in the wake of the extension of the

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[487] *Guidelines* (2009), 4
[488] 'BBFC Rejects Sexually Violent DVD', *British Board of Film Classification*, http://www.bbfc.co.uk/newsreleases/bbfc-rejects-sexually-violent-dvd-2, (accessed 27th April 2011)
[489] *BBFC Annual Report 2003*, 74
[490] *BBFC Annual Report 2003,* 74
[491] Robin Duvall, 'Lecture to the RSA: 21st Feb 2001', *British Board of Film Classification*, http://www.bbfc.co.uk/downloads/pub/Public%20Statements/Robin%20Duval%20lecture%20to%20the%20RSA.pdf, (accessed 8th May 2008), 14
[492] Duvall, (2001), 14-15

Obscene Publications Act, public debate moved away from arguments "about the explicitness of screen representations towards a consideration of any corrupting influence".[493]   However, the definition of harm inserted into the Video Recordings Act in 1994 explicitly requires the BBFC to take particular account of the "the manner in which the work deals with… human sexual activity"[494]. So while the BBFC may be noticeably more tolerant of sexually explicit material than it has been past, the Board's treatment of 'sex works' is likely to be more punitive than its handling of narrative film more generally. In comparison to the Board's handling of depictions of unsimulated sex in films like *Intimacy*[495] and *9 Songs*,[496] for example, which were passed without incident, the Board's *Guidelines* explicitly state that "sex works containing clear images of real sex, strong fetish material, sexually explicit animated images, or other very strong sexual images will be confined to the 'R18'category."[497]   Indeed, sex works are only permitted an '18' certificate where they contain only simulated scenes.

Within the BBFC *Guidelines* sex works are explicitly defined as " works whose primary purpose is sexual arousal or stimulation".[498] Setting aside the issue of an entire category of films that is defined with specific reference to its effect on the viewer, it nevertheless remains clear that it is a sex work's exclusive intent to arouse or stimulate that is problematic, and justifies more stringent regulation than any other type of film. All but the most innocuous erotica is likely to be relegated to the R18 category, which is subject to a further level of regulation insofar as it can only be sold through licensed sex shops, or shown in specially licensed cinemas to those over 18. The demand that the consumer must visit one of these establishments to buy or view such material, rather than buying it via mail order or in mainstream DVD outlets, acts as a significant barrier to its distribution insofar as these establishments are themselves subject to strict licensing laws that severely limit their availability in many areas of the country.

The stricter handling of R18 is not merely a question of limiting its distribution. The texts themselves are also subject to a great deal more cuts than narrative film. The BBFC may well highlight that the number of feature length cinema releases that required cuts has dropped from an all-time high of

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[493] 'History of the BBFC – The 1970's', *SBBFC: Students' British Board of Film Classification.* http://www.sbbfc.co.uk/student_guide_history1970s.asp, (accessed 10th Feb 2008)
[494] *Video Recordings Act*, sec. 4A(1)
[495] *Intimacy*, directed by Patrice Chereau, (France/UK/Germany/Spain: Studio Canal, 2001)
[496] *9 Songs*, directed by Michael Winterbottom, (UK: Optimum Releasing, 2004)
[497] Guidelines,(2009), 14
[498] Guidelines,(2009), 14

33.9% in 1974, to an all-time low of 0.9% in 2004 and 2007, indeed in both these years no cuts at all were required of cinema films intended for those over 18. However, what this surface statistic masks is the very large number of cuts required by the Video Recordings Act for videos and DVDs. In 2007, for example more than 95% of feature-length works submitted to the Board for classification were in fact intended for the video/DVD market. So while in 1974 the Board required cuts to just 240 films, in 2007 it required 547 video works to be similarly cut, including 22.8% of category 18 and 27.1% of R18 videos. Such figures obviously exclude the mundane acts of self-censorship freely entered into by film producers in order to meet the category restriction before submission, and yet nevertheless they considerably undermine the BBFC's claim to ever-increasing liberalisation.

However, it should be noted that despite the large number of cuts required of R18 material, the very presence of 'real sex' within these texts marks a significant liberalisation of the BBFC's policies since the 1990s.[499] And notably, content deemed unacceptable within the *Guidelines* for the R18 category, is predominantly that connected with non-consensual sex, the conduct of violence and/or physical harm. As a result, the BBFC can be seen to maintain its concern with sexual violence, even as it might also be wrongly applied to sado-masochistic works. As such, the Board's treatment of sex works appears to be more stringent that its handling of narrative film. That is, where images of non-consensual sex are strictly prohibited within works that are designed to 'arouse' the viewer, narrative film is given slightly more latitude in depicting rape and sexual violence, provided that the viewer is, under no circumstances, "encouraged to enjoy the pain of the victims of violence".[500]

The question of whether any given representation rape or violence is acceptable to the Board therefore circulates around the presumed pleasure of the spectator. Acceptability rests not on the text's explicitness, the duration, or even the brutality of the depiction, but rather on the matter of the quality of the experience available to the spectator within the text. Whether a particular scene of violence, and particularly sexual violence, should be cut, has therefore shifted from a consideration of whether the depiction itself is intrinsically indecent or obscene to a question of how the spectator is likely to engage with the text. So while *Irréversible* was passed without cuts on both film and video in the UK,

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[499] For a fuller account of the legal wrangles that forced this change see Robertson and Nicol, (2008), Sec. 15-018 to 15-020
[500] 'History of the BBFC – The 1970's'

despite its inclusion of a 9 minute brutally violent rape scene, when the film *I Spit On Your Grave* was resubmitted to the Board for video release in 2001, the BBFC required over 7 minutes of cuts on the grounds that the "manner of presentation or visual details, may sexually arouse rather than horrify". More specifically, "The Board felt that in parading and emphasising Jennifer's youthful nakedness during the rape scenes, the film presented the sexual excitement of rape from a male perspective in a manner which could excite aggressive males with a predisposition for enjoying non-consensual sex."[501] As we can clearly see here, it is neither Jennifer's nakedness nor the subject of rape that is cause for concern here. It is the possibility of arousal, excitement or enjoyment. As such we can clearly see that within this regulatory decision the 'problem' of cinema is clearly defined not as the text per se but as the inappropriate physiological and affective responses of the potential spectator, who is defined here, not as a rational or 'reasonably minded' adult but rather as "aggressive males with a predisposition for enjoying non-consensual sex". Censorship in this instance has been founded on the basis of the possible responses of those who are, by their very definition 'abnormal', in that they are not only aggressive, but possibly sexually 'deviant', and potentially 'criminal'.

The BBFC's *Guidelines* also express a significant concern over the inappropriate use of film works, by similarly 'deviant' individuals. In particular, the *Guidelines* suggest that classification decisions with regard to video works will be stricter because they may be "viewed out of context".[502] This too is prompted by the provisions the Video Recordings Act which stipulate that classificatory decisions must be made with "special regard to the likelihood of video works being viewed in the home".[503] In this instance legislation is specifically targeted toward an apparently "greater potential for harm" afforded by "the technological capacity to freeze-frame and replay scenes of sex or violence."[504] As a result, classificatory decisions must attempt to compensate for the increased control the viewer may gain on DVD or video. The more flexible reception practices, and increased potential for a viewer to 'read against the grain' of the ideological tone of the film 'as a whole' seemingly demand the BBFC's intervention. What is being regulated therefore are the available readings of a film. Outside of the cinema, narrative does not necessarily

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[501] "I Spit On Your Grave", *SBBFC: Students' British Board of Film Classification*, http://www.sbbfc.co.uk/case_study_I_spit.asp, (accessed 8th Jul 2008)
[502] *Guidelines*, (2005), 9
[503] *Video Recordings Act,* sec. 4(1)(a)
[504] Robertson and Nicol, (2008), 833

dominate, and therefore the decision to regulate on the grounds that a scene may be taken out of context, in some sense represents an attempt to enforce appropriate (i.e. institutionally sanctioned) interpretation of a film.

This point is emphasised with regard to the BBFC's policy on depictions of rape or sexual violence, where it is stated that "the Board may require cuts at any classification level. This is more likely with DVD or video than film because scenes can be replayed repeatedly."[505] The concern that underpins this section of the *Guidelines* represents more than an attempt to ensure that particular scenes are ideologically recovered by the text 'as a whole'. There is an implicit suggestion that these images might arouse in the viewer, and cuts would therefore be specifically required in order to prevent their use as a masturbatory aide. The implications of this Guideline are twofold: firstly that there may be a possibility that repeated viewing might prove harmful to the spectator; but perhaps more importantly, that at least some of the censorship decisions made by the BBFC are made explicitly on the grounds of the potential that images may be used inappropriately by sexually deviant individuals. The film *A Ma Soeur!*[506] is a case in point, where concern is explicitly expressed about the potential for the video or DVD to be used as a grooming tool on the one hand, and as a masturbatory aide on the other. As the BBFC put it:

> Two clinical psychologists advised that, on video, a rape scene involving a young girl could be used as a 'grooming tool' by paedophiles. In the context of an '18' rated cinema release, which effectively prohibits access by a child, this was not a concern. But the much more private and domestic context of a video viewing was another and rather more problematic matter[507]

Similarly in the BBFC's press release about the decision the Board suggest, "Videos of A Ma Soeur! may be more widely available and so more accessible for personal use to any individuals with abusive and paedophilic inclinations… the rape scene may arouse potential child abusers and be used as stimulus material."[508] A debate about the merits of the research evidence behind such a decision is beyond the scope of this thesis. Rather, my point here is to highlight the fact that censorship and classification decisions are being made under the rubric of potential 'harm', as required by the Video Recordings Act, and what the case of *A Ma Soeur!* neatly demonstrates is the way in which the potential

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[505] *Guidelines*, (2005), 11

[506] *A Ma Soeur!,* directed by Catherine Breillat, (France: Filmmuseum Distributie, 2001)

[507] British Board of Film Classification, *Annual Report 2002*, (London: BBFC, 2002), 13

[508] 'Video Version of A Ma Soeur! Cut', *British Board of Film Classification*, http://www.bbfc.co.uk/news/press/20020625.html, (accessed 8th Jul 2008)

viewer is constructed within this regulatory discourse as being either a vulnerable child at risk of harm or an actually or potentially deviant individual.

Within the BBFC *Guidelines* then, appropriate levels of censorship for film and video works aimed at an adult audience are being defined, not on the basis of its being viewed by a 'normal', 'reasonable' adult but with specific reference to those who are constructed as 'vulnerable', passive and lacking in critical faculties, or potentially criminal and/or sexually 'deviant'. The question of the appropriateness or suitability of any particular theme or depiction within a film then, circulates not so much around whether the text itself might be considered indecent or obscene, so much as whether the potential spectator, (as s/he is variously constructed and defined) will display appropriate relations with the text. And indeed, as we have seen, in some cases the question of regulation has completely shifted from what might be appropriately articulated within our society, to a regulation of how cinematic depictions might be appropriately used and understood by the spectator. Indeed, in these cases it is the spectator's capacity to use or respond to the film *inappropriately* that is being regulated.

Public Opinion

As I have already suggested, despite a dearth of conclusive evidence showing a causal link between viewing violence, sexual violence in particular, and either psychological damage and/or the commissioning of violent offences, the BBFC are keen to stress the support of the British public for their activities.[509] Indeed, the BBFC's public consultation on the *Guidelines* in both 2000 and 2005 showed that the majority of the British public saw the BBFC's handling of matters of sex and violence as being 'about right' in both studies.[510]

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[509] For examples see 'BBFC Cuts *Baise Moi*', *British Board of Film Classification*, http://www.bbfc.co.uk/news/press/20010226a.html, (accessed 8th May 2008), and 'Murder Set Pieces', *British Board of Film Classification*, http://www.bbfc.co.uk/website/Classified.nsf/0/C459C3DC24C72664802573FC005EB482, (accessed 8th May 2008)

[510] See Pam Hanley, *Sense and Sensibilities:Public Opinion and the BBFC Guidelines*, (London: BBFC, 2000), http://www.sbbfc.co.uk/Assets/documents/BBFCSense_Distill.pdf, (accessed 19th June 2010); and British Board of Film Classification, *Public Opinion and the BBFC Guidelines*

However this consent was evidently based on the belief that a causal link exists. During the 2005 study for example, respondents were asked whether "people are liable to copy activities they see portrayed on the screen, including activities which are criminal or dangerous. The survey showed that a majority (69%) agreed with the statement, which was a smaller number than that found in 2000 (74%)."[511] And similarly when asked if 'Watching violence in films generally makes people more likely to be violent in real life', 45% of the respondents agreed.[512] The question of whether regulation ought to be based on the public's beliefs about the nature of media effects rather than solid evidence notwithstanding, perhaps the most interesting finding of the 2000 report was that while

> 46% of the national sample agreed with the statement that "watching violence in films generally makes people more likely to be violent in real life". When members of the citizens' juries were asked their views on that statement at the outset of the jury process, half of them agreed with it. However, nearly three-quarters of them disagreed with it once they had heard the evidence of the 'expert witnesses'.[513]

What this suggests is that while the British public as a whole have a clear and apparently consistent view of the media's capacity to provoke anti-social effects, these might be liable to change in the wake of an explicit public debate about the issue.

We cannot assume however that this change will lead to a relaxation of regulatory policy. Indeed, research carried out by Dr Guy Cumberbatch on behalf of the BBFC in 2002 suggested that despite a "surprising tolerance of sexual violence in film…so long as it was justified in the storyline and it was 'in context'", for the British public "sexual violence in films remains far more controversial and less acceptable to viewers than either sex or violence."[514] Moreover in contrast to the two other consultation studies, "when first surveyed, 26% of the viewing panel had agreed that: '*Watching violence makes people more likely to be violent in real life.'* After seeing [a selection of sexually violent] films, the proportion agreeing rose to 44%."[515] Cumberbatch argues that the

2005, (London: BBFC, 2005), http://www.sbbfc.co.uk/Assets/documents/*Guidelines* research.pdf, (accessed 19th June 2010)
[511] *Public Opinion and the BBFC Guidelines,* (2005), 8
[512] *Public Opinion and the BBFC Guidelines,* (2005), 8
[513] Hanley, (2000), 5
[514] Dr Guy Cumberbatch, *Where do you draw the line?: Attitudes and reactions of video renters to sexual violence in film,* (London: BBFC, 2002), http://www.bbfc.co.uk/downloads/pub/Policy%20and%20Research/Where%20do%20you%20draw%20the%20line.pdf, (accessed 19th June 2010), 1-2
[515] Cumberbatch, (2002), 59

viewers "simply had not appreciated just how 'graphic' some of the films might be. Indeed, a number admitted to being *'quite shocked'* at the level of gritty sexual violence."[516] His argument implies that the panel's former 'liberal' attitude toward sexual violence on screen is, to some degree, born out of naïveté. However, in the context of a debate about media effects, what this suggests is that for the general public, exposure to depictions of sexual violence is less likely to 'desensitise' the viewer, or to lead to aggressive or violent behaviour, than it is to promote more conservative attitudes towards the regulation of such films!

While I appreciate that I am taking this evidence out of its intended context, my intention is to underscore the difficulty in these discussions. That is, as Richard Perloff contends, that people involved in discussions about media effects see themselves as being immune from their influence, whilst seeing others as being those who are vulnerable to any effects.[517] A point that Cumberbatch himself acknowledges. So while this statistic clearly shows that participating in a research study on sexual violence in film can change one's attitudes, the change that occurs is very different to that which the participant might attribute to those 'others'.

Cumberbatch's research suggests that "concern about what types of people would actually *want to* watch such - or at least some of the - films was common",[518] with concern being expressed that "advertising the film's content (such as 'contains graphic sexual violence') might attract 'the wrong audience'".[519] Concern was specifically expressed that watching a film featuring sexual violence might 'incite' those who were already "mentally or emotionally unstable" before viewing "to go out and do comparable things".[520] One particular comment by a focus group member sheds significant light on who exactly this 'wrong audience' might be:

> Susan (conservative): It still worries me, who would choose to hire it. It really still bothers me, who would actually choose to…to hire it and how, what they would feel about it. I mean, everybody in this room says we watched them, yeah they were discovered no lasting effects and we're not gonna go out and jump on somebody in the street, but it's the people who choose to. Y'know, that bothers me. How do they feel about people around them…are they, I mean, but are they gonna effect their attitudes towards women they live with, or women

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[516] Cumberbatch, (2002), 59
[517] Richard M. Perloff, 'The third-person effect', in *Media Effects: Advances in theory and research*, ed. Jennings Bryant & Dolf Zillman, (Mawah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2002)
[518] Cumberbatch, (2002), 2
[519] Cumberbatch, (2002), 2
[520] Cumberbatch, (2002), 60

they come into contact with? And that bothers me. I think if one rape came out of it, it'd be one too many.[521]

For this particular respondent the question of 'media effects' circulates around the possibility of a 'deviant spectator', and while Cumberbatch himself might argue against Susan's stimulus-response model of 'direct' effects, the research paper itself maintains the ever-present possibility of the abnormal viewer.

By which I mean, when participants within the study were explicitly asked *'Do you think that scenes of sexual violence might encourage copycat behaviour*?': 34% of the viewing panel agreed; a further 34% suggested that it *might* if the person was already predisposed to do so; 12% admitted it was a *possibility*; while the remaining 20% clearly disagreed and said *'no'*. However, although this latter 20% may well represent a minority view, in entirely rejecting the idea that scenes of sexual violence might lead to copycat crime, the report concludes, "These answers are somewhat difficult to evaluate, since, however unlikely, the theoretical possibility of some deviant mind being influenced by a film can never be completely rejected."[522] This conclusion not only undermines these viewers' opinions, but may in turn raise questions about to what extent participants framed their views in relation to the 'demand characteristics' of the research design.

That is not to say that Cumberbatch was personally invested in seeking support for film regulation on the basis of the public's belief in media effects. Indeed as we have already seen, Cumberbatch himself is renowned for being profoundly critical of the media effects canon as a whole.[523] However, this kind of speculation about other, deviant viewers may well have been provoked by the terms in which issues were addressed within the focus groups. That is, the BBFC's concern to uncover the extent of the public's belief in the risk of imitative effects may have solicited such responses. Indeed Cumberbatch himself is keen to point out that *spontaneous* comments about the possibility of copycat behaviour by 'other' viewers was actually quite rare within the discussions.[524]

But while public concern about 'media effects' is clearly focussed on the possibility of the 'deviant spectator', within Cumberbatch's study, one of the three primary reasons participants gave as to why a film or scene was problematic was the fact that it was 'disturbing'. Alongside aesthetic and moral

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[521] Cumberbatch, (2002), 61
[522] Cumberbatch, (2002), 59
[523] See for example, Guy Cumberbatch, *Video Violence: Villain or Victim? A review of the research evidence concerning media violence and its effects in the real world with additional reference to video games,* (London: Video Standards Council, 2004)
[524] Cumberbatch, (2002), 59

judgements that the films were 'too graphic' and respondents' beliefs that scenes were 'out of context', 23% of participants suggested that they had found elements of the film 'disturbing'. While worries about the disturbing nature of a film may well still be grounded in fears about others, this perspective also opens up the possibility that individuals felt that they themselves were affected, by what they had seen. As one respondent put it:

> The one thing I found really bad, erm, was that guy who's playing a retarded guy. It seemed like it was being played a bit for laughs, in the scene in the house. I think it was just his bad acting to be honest with you, but he was like a typical slow…he just seemed to be a humour character. And it just seemed really weird that he was stuck in the middle of this scene. I found myself laughing at him, which is really disturbing when you're watching a rape scene.[525]

As we will see in the next section, the question of laughter while viewing such horrific films and/or scenes reoccurs again and again in public discussions of this kind of film. And while some might suggest that laughing through certain kinds of horror movies is perfectly acceptable, and perhaps even part of the experience, the idea that one might laugh whilst viewing a scene of actual or implied sexual violence is almost universally acknowledged to be wholly unacceptable, likely evidence of a sick and twisted mind and repugnant to the point that it invites social censure. However, while these discussions tend to revolve around the possibility of 'inappropriate' and 'unsolicited' laughter from an ideologically divergent, and possibly socially deviant individual, what is interesting about this comment is that his or her own laughter is taken as a sign, not of personal psychological problems, as it may be interpreted in the context of behaviourist research or when witnessed by an outside observer, but an issue with the film itself, and a specific justification for regulation.

What this solicited discussion of 'media effects' within Cumberbatch's study suggests then, is that the British public, at least insofar as they are represented in Cumberbatch's study, are engaging in a debate over depictions of sexual violence in a way that suggests that concerns over the 'harm' that might be done by such depictions circulate around the motives and pleasures of a 'deviant' viewer. As such, the problem of potential harm inflicted by such depictions is not discussed in social, cultural, moral or even ideological terms per se. Rather, the issue has become thoroughly subjectified in the figure of this deviant 'other'.

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[525] Commenting on *I Spit on your Grave,* directed by Meir Zarchi, (USA: Astra Video, 1978), Cumberbatch, (2002), 49

However, as Barker et al point out in their study of the *Audiences and Receptions of Sexual Violence in Contemporary Cinema*, Cumberbatch's research

> focussed on the views of a demographically balanced sample in relation to what adults in general should and should not be allowed to view. Respondents were asked to view films which, in normal circumstances, they might never have chosen to view. As such, it revealed the extent of public concern over what impact certain films might have on *other people*, and relied on assumptions about how the 'other people' might experience and respond to such films.[526]

By contrast, Barker et al sought to study 'naturally occurring' audiences for films featuring depictions of sexual violence, and chose to recruit individuals who had positive responses to these films to their focus groups. As such, Barker et al attempted to counter the "moral fears and preconceptions" that lie at the heart of "claims about what 'audiences' must be doing if they watch and enjoy screened sexual violence".[527] Instead, they sought to discover how these audiences made sense of scenes of sexual violence and explore "the nature of their pleasures and valuations."[528]

Somewhat unsurprisingly, the research found that the natural audience for these films often characterised their experiences of viewing in physical or visceral terms, and in keeping with Annette Hill's work, some of the more 'extreme' visitations of rape or torture were discussed in terms of endurance, coping and/or testing oneself. Within discussions of *Irréversible* for example, "writers often construct endurance narratives around the rape scene",[529] while for *Ichi The Killer*[530] "narratives of preparation, anticipation, viewing, and comparing one's own reactions to others, abound."[531] More interesting though is the researchers' discovery of the extent to which the judgements and policies of the BBFC had an impact on the formation of the viewer's sense of identity:

> It is not merely that some audiences would like to 'push' against what they would regard as the 'nanny-ism' of the BBFC. It is just as much that they feel watched, measured and judged. This can lead in several directions: to angry denunciation, or to 'bad behaviour', or to a certain self-

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[526] Barker et al, (2007), i
[527] Barker et al, (2007), 191
[528] Barker et al, (2007), 2
[529] Barker et al, (2007), 151
[530] *Ichi The Killer,* directed by Takashi Miike, (Japan/Hong Kong/South Korea: Prénom H. Co. Ltd, 2001)
[531] Barker et al, (2007), 128

watching, for fear that you might appear to be as you fear others see you.[532]

In some instances this was a matter of the audience arguing against received models of harm, particularly those that circulate around the question of sexual arousal.[533] In other instances however, the fears and preconceptions that circulate around the presumed pleasures of these audiences can be seen to pose a very real threat to the individual's sense of self.

As part of a focus group discussing *The Last House on the Left*[534] for example, Keith from Glasgow suggested that:

> I'm just interested in this type of cinema and this is an example of it and, you know, I appreciate fully that it is a problematic film and I don't mind if you are, if you object to it or whatever, you know, just as long as you don't sort-of confuse me showing this film with, you know, thinking anything about me as a person,' as it were.[535]

Keith's response highlights his awareness of how other people might perceive and construe his appreciation of *The Last House on the Left* and exploitation cinema more generally. The 'risk' Keith perceives in relation to this film is not the possibility of psychological, emotional or behavioural harm, but a direct threat to his social identity. This awareness of being judged particularly characterised the reception of *Irréversible* where "the negative reaction (actual or assumed) of a partner/friends to either the viewing of the film or even the possibility of viewing the film"[536] was often presented as a reason for seeking out the opportunity to discuss the film online.

Although there were some key exceptions, to which I will return in a moment, in the main those who embraced these films were well aware that they were, potentially, the 'deviant others' referred to by anxious mainstream audiences in studies like that conducted by Cumberbatch. As a result, respondents were often concerned to defend themselves against being categorised in this way. Viewers of *Irréversible* for example frequently reported very visceral responses to the rape scene. "Disgust, revulsion, anger and feeling physically sick are commonly reported, and these experiences although unpleasant in themselves, are strangely comforting because they are understood to be the right responses to a horrific act".[537] As this might suggest,

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[532] Barker et al, (2007), 191
[533] Barker et al, (2007), 94
[534] *The Last House on the Left,* directed by Wes Craven, (USA: Hallmark Releasing, 1972)
[535] Barker et al, (2007), 106
[536] Barker et al, (2007), 148
[537] Barker et al, (2007), 151

viewers had a very clear sense of what are considered 'appropriate' and what are considered 'inappropriate' responses to sexual violence, and on the whole Barker et al found that viewers were concerned to distance themselves from such impropriety. As such, the kind of revulsion reported by viewers of *Irréversible* was held up as evidence that one is "not 'sick' for taking eventual pleasure from such a disturbing film."[538] But further, individuals could also be seen to regulate their own reception practices in order to guard against the inappropriate 'misreading' of a film. Keith from Glasgow elaborates:

> I think it's a film that I would sort-of hesitate to show to somebody unless you know, kind of, I was confident that they were sort-of 'get it'… it's a film could very easily be taken the wrong way and, you know, I would not want in any case to show this film to, um, you know, sort of, uh, kind of, in a laddish context, I think that would be a completely inappropriate, and you know, I would not feel comfortable sort of if people were sort of drinking lager or, you know, really 'getting off on it', as it were[539]

For Keith, the enjoyment of exploitation cinema is clearly founded on a specialist knowledge of the codes and conventions of the genre. But perhaps more importantly, his response suggests that not only is there a right way and a wrong way to read and consume such films, but also that he might police his own distribution practices based on his assessment of the potential viewer. And despite Keith's awareness of the possibility that people might judge him for his taste in films, like members of the anxious mainstream before him, he nevertheless engages in the process of constructing his own version of the 'dangerous other'. The question of whether the 'laddish' viewer 'who gets off on it' is representative of Keith's own fears, or whether it is merely a reiteration of what he perceives to be the figure that underpins the mainstream audience's hostility to such films is not entirely clear.

However, Keith is not atypical. Although it was more common for those who disliked and 'refused' the films to define and describe this 'other audience', those who embraced these films also raised the possibility that depictions of sexual violence might arouse or titillate others. In their analysis of responses to a questionnaire about *Irréversible* for example, Barker et al found that

> there is almost always an implied 'other', the person who is 'titillated', the one who is aroused by the scene. This is of course partly the result of thinking about the BBFC's position on this (provoked by the form of our question). But we don't

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[538] Barker et al, (2007), 149
[539] Barker et al, (2007), 106

think it is entirely so. It is also that this is a possibility that must be acknowledged and held away.[540]

The question of arousal therefore becomes central to the definition of the 'deviant' response, and not surprisingly it was relatively rare for any of the participants in the study to talk about arousal in the first person. Indeed for most heterosexual males watching *Irréversible* "it is both a relief not to be turned on (or to rapidly cease to be turned on) – proof that they are 'normal' and not sexually deviant".[541] What is notable here is that these viewers were not simply reporting their responses, but were actively engaged in a process of reflection over the subjective meaning of those responses. In this respect, these viewers not only show an awareness of how they might be viewed by the BBFC, and by the public at large, but in some sense are producing themselves a 'normal subjects' through the process of interrogating their own relations to the screen.

Indeed, as Barker et al point out, in some discussions there was a good deal of attention paid to how disturbed the poster was "by their own response to the rape scene (as opposed to how directly disturbed they were by the rape scene)."[542] For example, one contributor suggests that

"The most disturbing thing about this movie to me was my reaction to the rape scene. It didn't do as much to me as I knew it should. I knew I was supposed to be horrified and hurting, but I wasn't"[543]

What this suggests is that viewers are aware of how they ought to respond to such scenes, and are actively monitoring and interrogating their own responses in relation to these 'normative' standards. One might suggest that there is an implicit fear within this comment that the viewer has become 'desensitised', and as a result, this poster devotes a lengthy tract to recovering or justifying this worrying response in order to assure the reader, and perhaps himself that this response was 'normal'. That is, a response born out of relief that the incessant, nauseating movement of the camera had finally come to an end.

That is not to say however that all members of the audience were concerned to defend themselves against their categorisation as a 'problem' viewer. Indeed many of the 'fans' of *The Last House on the Left* consciously embraced their own vilification by the public at large. For this group "engaging positively with this film means enjoying embracing something which you know to

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[540] Barker et al, (2007), 165
[541] Barker et al , (2007),152
[542] Barker et al, (2007), 161
[543] Barker et al, (2007), 160

be socially unacceptable to the majority of the audience. As a result there are many self-conscious self-categorisations as 'sick'."[544] These viewers not only recognised that they were the 'deviant others' referred to by the anxious mainstream, but their assured assertion of their own difference also made them more likely to admit to having 'inappropriate responses' to the film.[545]

Similarly those involved in the BDSM community were acutely aware of how their relations to images of sexual violence were perceived to be a significant problem. In particular, their sexual orientation was seen by the researchers to be especially problematic insofar as it challenges "the notion that representations of rape can only be acceptable if they resist being arousing."[546]

And finally, Barker et al found a significant number of what they term a defiant 'gross' response, which defended the right to enjoy the rape for the purposes of sexual stimulation. The researchers assert that these latter posts are produced on public forums by those who are already well aware of the kind of reactions this kind of post will garner, and as such might be seen as a form of 'trolling'. However:

> For those who have made an analysis whereby they are normal because they were horrified not aroused, and that the film is inherently not arousing in structure, these claims are highly problematic. The film is responsibly made, as proven by the fact that it has not corrupted the writer, thus evidence of others' arousal is often claimed as evidence of prior deviance.[547]

In this instance calling the poster 'sick' or 'some kind of sex offender' becomes a means of making sense of and managing their (bad) behaviour. That is, labelling these posters as 'deviant' is not only an attempt to dissuade the other party to desist in their assertions of arousal within the forum, but in a more general sense, can also be seen as a way of 'pathologising' certain forms of responses. Nevertheless, for those who reject films like *Irréversible*, contributors who assert their arousal at scenes of sexual violence, provide evidence of the potential danger posed by the film.

While this research was carried out on behalf of the BBFC, the team avoided making any policy recommendations on the strength of their findings. And indeed, to date the BBFC have also avoided any change in their regulations as a result of the report. What this study suggests of course is that, in the main,

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[544] Barker et al, (2007), 95
[545] Barker et al, (2007), 125
[546] Barker et al, (2007), 78
[547] Barker et al, (2007), 159

audiences for films featuring sexual violence are not as 'dangerous', and nor are their readings and responses as worrying as the general public might fear. However, this study fails to adequately dispense with those fears for two primary reasons. Firstly, although this excellent piece of research might give us an extremely nuanced insight into how real audiences handle culturally sensitive material like this, the methodology and interpretive framework it adopts can never challenge the media effects canon on its own terms. This is somewhat indicative of the difficulty cultural studies faces in disputing the findings of media effects more generally. That is, behavioural psychology as a whole might suggest that individuals are wholly unaware of the effect of these films on their behaviour, or on their perception of the world. The second problem with the findings however, is that rather than allaying moral fears and preconceptions about the 'deviant viewer', the results of this research actually confirms their existence. On the one hand, the research points to a small minority of viewers who, whether defiantly or mischievously, declare their enjoyment of and sexual arousal in the consumption of images of sexual violence. And on the other hand, the research also confirms that this very small minority remain a worry for the 'natural' audiences for these films, as well as for the public at large. As such, to paraphrase Cumberbatch, the research stops short of the impossible task of precluding the theoretical possibility of some deviant mind being influenced by these films.

However, the value of this work is in the researchers' deliberate attempt to problematise the self-evident association between sexual arousal and harm. Within the report they have sought the opportunity to highlight the ways in which viewers themselves either explicitly or implicitly challenge the assumption that arousal will lead to harm, perhaps even that arousal is evidence of harm in and of itself. Indeed the Barker et al claim that while

> there is strong evidence within our study (a) that many – both men and women – do find some such scenes arousing, but (b) that this can associated with *greater* condemnation of the violence because the arousal heightens awareness and involvement, and thus imaginative participation in the implications of the scene.[548]

In addition, in their summary of the possible implications of their work Barker et al highlight the fact that certain "figures of the audience"[549] haunt the criteria by which films featuring sexual violence are judged. That is, the researchers assert

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[548] Barker et al, (2007), 3
[549] Barker et al, (2007), 191

that within the reports on the BBFC's judgements on each of the five films under scrutiny, the BBFC implicitly relied on models of spectator/text relations that were "unavailable for critical scrutiny".[550] With regard to media effects studies which explicitly problematise 'sexual arousal' in the face of depictions of sexual and sexualised violence, Barker et al suggested it was especially imperative that the BBFC allow the studies on which their regulations are based to be put to the test.

As I have already suggested, rather that prove a harmful link between sexual arousal and viewing sexual violence, many of these studies simply assume this association. Indeed, in most cases sexual arousal *is* the deviant or 'harmful' response that researchers are testing for. These studies therefore are not only normatively defining 'appropriate' physical and affective responses to such films, but in its emphasis on comparisons between 'normal' men and convicted rapists, or occasionally 'force oriented' men, the 'media effects' canon forges a clear discursive link between arousal, sexually violent imagery and individual sexual deviance. In associating sexual arousal with a group of individuals who have either previously committed a sexual offence, or with those identified as being more likely to in the future, media effects succeeds in stigmatising this kind of response in such a way as to imply that there is a necessary connection between arousal and the commissioning of a sex crime.

Moreover, as William L. Marshall[551] suggests, studies that test for physiological arousal are inherently flawed. For example, studies that test for arousal responses to non-consenting sex, most often rely on a test of penile tumescence. What they depend on, Marshall argues, is that being a rapist, or being a 'force-oriented male' is in itself a conditioned response. The assumption is that when tested, rapists and 'force-oriented males' would inevitably display their conditioned arousal to the 'deviant' acts depicted; an assumption that is not necessarily borne out by large scale studies comparing the responses of rapists to non-rapists, where little difference was found between the two groups.[552] Indeed two large scale studies suggest that arousal responses to images of non-consenting sex might actually be lower for the majority of offenders than for

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[550] Barker et al, (2007), 191

[551] William L. Marshall, 'Clinical and Research Limitations in the Use of Phallometric Testing with Sexual Offenders', *Sexual Offender Treatment*, 1, Issue 1, (2006), **http://www.sexual-offender-treatment.org/marshall.0.html**, (accessed 10th Feb 2008)

[552] D.J. Baxter, Howard E. Barbaree and William L. Marshall, 'Sexual responses to consenting and forced sex in a large sample of rapists and nonrapists', *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 24, issue 5, (1986)

consenting sexual material.[553] Furthermore, Marshall suggests, both offenders and non-offenders have demonstrated an ability to fake response patterns and fool phallometric testing devices, either by inhibiting arousal by using mental activities to distract themselves, or by generating arousal to non-preferred stimuli.[554]

As such even those studies which show that 'normal' young men might be caused harm as a result of become aroused in response to depictions of non-consenting sex where the woman is portrayed as being aroused are at best unreliable. But further, as Lynne Segal suggests they present sexual arousal as though it were the necessary corollary of sexually violent behaviour rather than actually proving this is the case. In doing so these studies fail to address "the complex question of the relationship between fantasy and reality…when we know…from the studies of Nancy Friday, Shere Hite and Thelma McCormack…that [sado-masochistic] fantasy is commonly used by both men and women to enhance sexual arousal".[555] Arousal by images would therefore seem to be a very poor predictor of actual behaviour.

However the historical roots of the BBFC as a voluntary rather than statutory body, mean that they are arguably driven as much by public opinion as by research evidence. In this respect the public's 'common sense' association between sexual arousal, images of sexual violence and harm, and the theoretical possibility of the 'deviant viewer', provide a significant impetus toward the regulation of films of this kind, despite the dearth of credible evidence. Moreover, the BBFC's duties under the Video Recordings Act require that even after the possibility of children viewing material intended for an adult audience is precluded, the Board must assess "the danger of adult viewers being morally

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[553] D.J. Baxter, William L. Marshall, Howard E. Barbaree, P.R. Davidson and P.B. Malcolm, 'Deviant sexual behavior: Differentiating sex offenders by criminal and personal history, psychometric measures, and sexual responses', *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 11, no.4 (1984) and William L. Marshall, Howard E. Barbaree, D.R. Laws and D.J. Baxter, 'Rapists Do Not Have Deviant Sexual Preferences: Large Scale Studies from Canada and California', Paper presented at the *12th Annual Meeting of the International Academy of Sex Research*, Amsterdam, (Sept 1986)

[554] Donald E. Henson and H.B. Rubin, 'Voluntary control of eroticism', *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 4, no.1 (Spring 1971); D.R. Laws and H.B. Rubin, 'Instructional control of an autonomic response', *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 2, no.2, (Summer 1969); G.C.N. Hall, W.C. Proctor and G.M. Nelson, 'Validity of physiological measures of pedophilic sexual arousal in a sexual offender population', *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 56, issue 1 (February 1988); D.R. Laws, and Martin L. Holmen, 'Sexual response faking by pedophiles' *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 5, no.4 (1978); and Alina Wydra, William L. Marshall, C.M. Earls, and Howard E. Barbaree, 'Identification of cues and control of sexual arousal by rapists', *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 21, issue 5 (1983)

[555] Lynne Segal, 'Does Pornography Cause Violence? The Search for Evidence', *Dirty Looks: Women, Pornography, Power*, ed. Pamela Church Gibson and Roma Gibson, (London: BFI, 1993), 13

corrupted or being persuaded to emulate anti-social acts."[556] The Board are therefore asked to pass judgement on the potential 'risk' of harm, not on solid evidence that it can and does occur, and have chosen in many cases to take a cautious approach when dealing with apparent evidence of media effects. In this respect, it would seem that cultural studies is charged with an impossible task if the Board depends on studies 'precluding the possibility of the deviant viewer', or providing sufficient proof that there is absolutely no risk of harm in watching depictions of sexual violence, in effect countering decades of ingrained cultural assumptions.

The Gender of 'Media Effects'

Also of note within these assumptions is the construction of the figure of the actual or potentially deviant viewer as a thoroughly gendered subject. Within the discourse of media effects it is male viewing that is problematised and constituted as being in need of regulation and control. Indeed as Karen Boyle argues in her book *Media and Violence*,[557] discussions of media effects often fail to acknowledge the implicit sexual stereotyping that underpins their assumptions. Indeed, as Boyle points out, in an early review of the literature on the effects of violence on television, of 67 studies examined there was only one study that looked exclusively at effects on women.[558] While a more recent analysis of 217 effects studies revealed that while 40% of research was focussed solely on effects upon the male population, only 2% of studies looked exclusively at female viewers.[559]   And I suspect that this trend might be even more exaggerated if we were to look exclusively at studies of sexual violence.

Boyle argues that one of the central problems with media effects research is that it actually works to mask significant biases represented in the populations of study. Boyle suggests that this research has focused predominantly on a very specific audience group, which has then been used to

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[556] Robertson and Nicol, (2008), 835
[557] Boyle, (2005)
[558] F.S. Andison, 'TV violence and viewer aggression: a cumulation of study results', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 41, (1977)
[559] H. Paik, & G. Comstock, "The effects of television violence on antisocial behaviour: a meta-analysis'. *Communication Research*. 21, (1994), 524

make generalisations about the viewing public at large. The vast majority of effects research has been carried out in the US for example, placing the findings and the viewers in a very particular social, cultural and political context which is rarely, if ever, acknowledged within the discussion. Moreover college students are disproportionately represented as a subject group within these studies, presumably because of ease of access within the academy. However, as Boyle suggests, college students cannot be considered to be representative of even the US population in terms of age, class, race or educational background. Indeed Paik and Comstock found that within media effects research 85% of the total sample was drawn from a group with ages in the range 6-21, with boys and male college students predominating.[560] Furthermore, Boyle argues studies often cast a veil over gender difference, meaning that even within those media effects studies that include both men and women within the sample, the results are only broken down by gender in 40% of cases.[561]

Boyle's aim within her research is to highlight the gendered nature of violence within contemporary society which, she argues is masked within both popular representations of violence on screen and within the effects research more generally. As Boyle herself puts it:

> It should worry feminist anti-violence campaigners that effects research has been predominantly concerned with acts of male-on-male physical violence as both on-screen cause and off-screen effect although the gender of perpetrator and victim is often considered to be insignificant…In this way, researchers have perpetuated the 'normality' of male violence – it's not male violence, its just violence – while making violence against women invisible.[562]

Moreover, Boyle suggests that the debate over media effects is itself a symptom of a society in which male violence is thoroughly normalised. A society in which "blaming individual media representations becomes a way of not asking more pressing questions about the construction of masculinity in our culture".[563]

What Boyle's argument suggests is that debates over media effects are a tacit way of excusing male violence within our culture; that masculinity itself is the problem that we as a culture are failing to deal with. Of course, Boyle's research focuses on a wide selection of media coverage of copycat killings,

[560] Paik and Comstock (1994), 524, cited in Karen Boyle, 'Screening Violence: A Feminist Critique of the Screen Violence Debate', Paper presented at *Women's Worlds 99: 7th International Interdisciplinary Congress on Women,* Tromso, June 20th-26th 1999, http://www.skk.uit.no/WW99/papers/Boyle_Karen.pdf, (accessed 11th May 2008), 7
[561] Paik and Comstock (1994), cited in Boyle (2005), 17
[562] Boyle, (2005), 19
[563] Boyle, (2005), 13

representations of violence, and effects debates in general. Within specific debates about sexual violence on screen, gender is not ignored in the same way. Indeed it is predominantly male on female violence that is under scrutiny. As a result, gender is absolutely central to these debates. And far from ignoring male violence, the threat posed by young men is the central issue under examination. In this respect I concur with Boyle that pressing questions need to be asked about the contemporary construction of masculinity within our culture.

More particularly, I would argue, we need to ask questions about how 'masculinity' comes to be constructed as 'violent', 'aggressive' and a 'sexual threat'. That is, how within popular representations and debates, male violence is taken to be the norm, and similarly, how media effects research normatively constructs masculinity as violent, potentially violent, aggressive or simply callous. This issue is thrown into sharp relief in the BBFC's judgment on the film *Baise Moi!* where just one cut was required in order to prevent the film from appearing 'explicitly pornographic' in the BBFC's view. The justification for the cut to a brutal male on female rape scene early in the film was "in part informed by the evidence of media effects research that violent pornography may excite aggressive responses from some male viewers."[564] However similar acts of violence visited on men by the two female protagonists remain untouched. As the BBFC explain, "it is also relevant that the two female protagonists remain in control of events: the most serious concern identified by effects research, which is male sexual aggression, is not an issue in the rest of the film."[565] So while the BBFC do admit to the *possibility* that pornography might excite female, as well as male viewers, this is nowhere constructed within the press release as a problem. Indeed, the central issue that necessitated the cut to the film is emphatically 'male sexual aggression', and the fact that the protagonists are female, and remain in control throughout the film, negates any need for further cuts within the film. Far from being hidden, or masked, within the regulatory discourse, gender and concomitant assumptions about gendered subjectivity, are absolutely central to the process of classification.

I would also suggest that within debates about pornography, sexualised violence and sexual violence it is masculinity that is constructed as a problem in need of regulation. So while laboratory experiments tend to focus implicitly or explicitly on male viewing, in areas in which women's viewing becomes an issue

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[564] 'BBFC Cuts *Baise Moi!*', *British Board of Film Classification*, http://www.bbfc.co.uk/news/press/20010226a.html, (accessed 8th May 2008)
[565] 'BBFC Cuts *Baise Moi!*'

in its own right, the problem of women's viewing is framed in very different terms indeed. Detailed discussion of these studies, which focus predominantly on television viewing, is somewhat outside the scope of my study here, but it is nevertheless important to highlight the significant differences in the way in which both masculinity and femininity are constructed with effects discourse.

Briefly then, one area which has highlighted women's viewing is cultivation theory, most closely associated with George Gerbner,[566] a US based researcher whose central focus is on television viewing. His work suggests that those who consume the most television are most susceptible to what he dubs the 'mean world syndrome'. That is, the most frequent consumers of television are far more likely than others to overestimate the prevalence of violence and crime within their neighbourhood, as well as the likelihood that they themselves might become victims of violent crime. Within this research, women have been consistently identified as 'heavier' viewers than men, and as such are more prone to cultivating a 'mean world view'. As Boyle suggests there are significant problems with Gerbner's approach, for example, while these studies identify those it labels 'heavy viewers', it asks very few questions about whether they are actually heavy viewers of programmes containing crime and violence, and nor does it adequately investigate the individual respondent's lived experience of crime in their neighbourhoods and in their homes.[567] More important for our discussion here however, is Boyle's observation that 'taken alongside the behavioural studies…there seems to be an assumption that male viewers act and female viewers are acted on."[568]

Similarly studies by Schlesinger et al, *Women Viewing Violence* and *Men Viewing Violence*,[569] self-consciously sought to challenge the media effects debates by conducting audience research that aimed to explore the way in which real viewers understood and responded to screen violence. But while in the study *Women Viewing Violence* the researchers sought to recruit women

[566] For examples see George Gerbner, Lawrence Gross, Marilyn Jackson-Beeck, Suzanne Jeffries-Fox, and Nancy Signorielli, 'Cultural Indicators: Violence Profile No. 9', *Journal of Communication,* 28, No 3, (1978), George Gerbner, Lawrence Gross, Michael Morgan, and Nancy Signorielli, 'Growing Up with Television: The Cultivation Perspective', in *Media Effects: Advances in Theory and Research*, ed. Jennings Bryant and Dolf Zillman, (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1994) and George Gerbner, Lawrence Gross, Nancy Signorielli, Michael Morgan and Marilyn Jackson-Beeck, 'The Demonstration of Power: Violence Profile No 10', *Journal of Communication,* 29, no 3, (1979)
[567] See Boyle, (2005), 22 for further discussion
[568] Boyle, (2005), 21
[569] Philip Schlesinger, R. Emerson Dobash, Russell P. Dobash, and C. Kay Weaver, *Women Viewing Violence*, (London: British Film Institute, 1992) and Philip Schlesinger, Richard Haynes, Raymond Boyle, Brian McNair, Rebecca Emerson Dobash and Russell Dobash, Me*n Viewing Violence*, (London: Brodcasting Starndards Council, 1998)

from two specific groups "those who had experienced violent attacks from men and those who had not",[570] men on the other hand, were not chosen on these grounds as it was deemed unlikely that men "would readily identify themselves as either victims or perpetrators of violence."[571] Nevertheless, the report suggests that the questionnaire maintained some central elements of the previous study "that relate to experiences of being physically attacked and about men's use of the criminal justice system. However, we also introduced a section to investigate men's perpetration of violence in order to assess the levels of violence for individuals or groups."[572] Schlesinger et al stress however, that data was gathered on both men's experience and perpetration of crime on the grounds that crime statistics show that young men are both the most likely perpetrators and victims of violence. But while there is no escaping the fact that the vast majority of recorded violent crime within our society is apparently committed by men, I think it is important to ask to what extent these studies 'reflect' the gendered nature of such crime, and to what extent they are merely reiterating gender stereotypes, and, by extension 'producing' these gendered subjectivities.

In both *Women Viewing Violence* and *Men Viewing Violence* there is a clear gender bias that disproportionately positions women as victims and men as perpetrators of violence. The idea that men might be fruitfully divided into focus groups centred around their experience of violence at the hands of men, as the women were, is dismissed as an inappropriate method within the study, and focus is instead given to the likelihood that they have at some point been perpetrators of violence, a position not even considered for the women in the first study. In this sense many of the women in the *Women Viewing Violence* study were specifically invited to take up a position, to produce themselves, and to speak as a *victim* of violence. More specifically, they were invited to speak as a subject who had endured violence at the hands of *men,* about their understandings of and responses to depictions of male violence against women. It is little wonder then that discussion in this first study expressed considerable concerns about 'men' as viewers, and what might be done to control their reception of such material. And while the male participants in the *Men Viewing Violence* study were not 'invited' to take up a position as either victim or perpetrator per se, the focus of the study opens up the possibility that many of

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[570] Schlesinger et al, (1998), 9
[571] Schlesinger et al, (1998), 9
[572] Schlesinger et al, (1998), 11

these men might be categorised as 'perpetrators'; a position entirely absent in the construction of women's viewing.

Within behavioural studies that form the basis of the case for harm in the consumption of depictions of sexual violence, two distinct strands of research prevail. The first compares a group of males already categorised as 'abnormal', 'deviant' or 'criminal', drawing from groups of 'offenders' and comparing their responses to those deemed otherwise 'normal' men.[573] And a second strand, that seeks to show that 'normal' men have the capacity to hold or to develop objectionable or otherwise deviant views and behaviours in relation to violent, and sexually violent, imagery.[574] Stepping back from the issue of whether or not the findings of these researchers actually prove to be an accurate reflection of the potential impact of media on the viewer, what appears to be happening within this field of study is the production and specification of a contemporary model of 'deviant spectatorship'. More specifically, this model is built on a foundation of 'deviant masculinity'. As such, the research itself is deeply normative; bracketing off a range of attitudes, beliefs, responses and perhaps even sexual practices as not simply socially or culturally undesirable, but as harmful and damaging. As such, these discourses represent a set of texts that are implicitly, and occasionally explicitly, aimed at the contemporary reformation of masculinity, or at the very least, masculine spectatorship.

That is not to say that women, or female spectators are wholly unaffected by this shift. Indeed, as we saw in the previous studies by Schlesinger et al, women's viewing is no less constructed than male viewing. What it does suggest however is that the transformation and increased regulation of spectatorship that has occurred in recent times is being played out predominantly in masculine terms. As we have already seen, it is male viewing that is constructed as 'suspect' and in need of investigation and control, in the popular consciousness, in the regulatory discourses, and within behavioural

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[573] See for example, Gene G. Abel, David H. Barlow, Edward B. Blanchard and Donald Guild, 'The components of rapists' sexual arousal', *Archives of General Psychiatry* 34, no.8 (1977), Howard E. Barbaree, William L. Marshall and R.D. Lanthier, 'Deviant sexual arousal in rapists', *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 17, issue 3, (1979), Neil M. Malamuth, 'Rape fantasies as a function of exposure to violent sexual stimuli', *Archives of Sexual Behaviour*, 10, (1981), D.J. Baxter, Howard E. Barbaree and William L. Marshall, 'Sexual responses to consenting and forced sex in a large sample of rapists and nonrapists'*, Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 24, issue 5, (1986)
[574] See for example, Neil M. Malamuth, Maggie Heim and Seymour Feshbach, 'Sexual Responsiveness of College Students to Rape Depictions: Inhibitory and Disinhibitory Effects', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 38, no.3 (1980), Neil M. Malamuth and James V.P. Check, 'Sexual arousal to rape and consenting depictions: The importance of the woman's arousal', *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 89, no.6 (1980), Neil M. Malamuth and James V.P. Check, 'Sexual arousal to rape depictions: Individual differences', *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 92, no.1 (1983)

studies of media effects. Women are constructed time and again within the discourse as the potential victims of aggressive and violent male responses, while female spectatorship is often, though not always, seen to be the repository of 'appropriate' fear, disgust and revulsion at images of violence.

So on the one hand women are warned by popular magazines to avoid any man looking to rent a horror film on the grounds that he may well hold "questionable feelings about women. Whether buried deep within him or overtly expressed in his words and actions, his misogynistic tendencies make him a man to avoid."[575] While on the other hand, women, like Annette Hill, who claim to enjoy watching violence on screen are treated with incomprehension. As she puts it:

> My taste in violent cinema is often interpreted by other people as 'odd', particularly by other women who shake their heads, in confusion and ask me 'why would you want to watch something like that?', 'something like that' meaning violent films are unspeakable, repulsive and often involve violence towards women.[576]

As both Cherry[577] and Hill argue, horror and violence in film are constructed both in the popular consciousness and within the film industry as a masculine domain and a source of dubious masculine pleasure. All of which, Barker[578], Cumberbatch & Howitt[579] and Gauntlett[580] argue, leads to a stigmatisation of fans of media violence that actively hinders both open debate and objective research within the field.

The Subjectification of Film Regulation

As we have already seen, the model of harm propounded by both American media effects researchers, and the corollary British legislative framework frequently construct the viewers of such films as either 'vulnerable' or

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[575] E. Lederman, 'The best places to meet good men', *Cosmopolitan,* June 1992, quoted in Cherry, (1999), 187
[576] Annette Hill, '"Looks Like it Hurts': Women's Responses to Shocking Entertainment', in Barker and Petley, (2001)
[577] Cherry, (1999)
[578] Barker, (1984)
[579] Cumberbatch and Howitt, (1989)
[580] Gauntlett, (2005)

potentially 'deviant' viewers. These constructions serve to legitimate institutional interventions, but they also serve to shape the cultural context in which the viewing of these films occurs. What I want to demonstrate in the final part of this chapter is that the viewers of torture porn generally, and *Wolf Creek* specifically, are indeed thoroughly stigmatised by both the press and public alike. Both reviewers and commentators regularly discuss these 'deviant' viewers in order to justify their rejection of the film. And in the course of these discussions commentators can be surprisingly specific in the way in which they differentiate between 'normal', 'acceptable' readings and responses, and 'abnormal' or 'deviant' ones. The process of classifying readings and responses in terms of their 'normalcy' and 'deviancy' however, does not simply describe observable behaviour. Rather, these arguments actively attempt to delineate appropriate, socially sanctioned readings and responses to this 'problematic' film. As such, reviews and commentaries act as more than simple recommendations or remonstrations of particular films, they can also be highly prescriptive with regard to 'acceptable' readings and responses of those who go to see the film. As we will see, what is at stake within these reviews and commentaries about *Wolf Creek*, is not so much the *behaviour* of the individual within the audience per se, but the cultural constitution of normative standards for the spectator's affective relations to a film containing sexual violence and/or sexualised violence.

Indeed what I want to suggest is that, while the BBFC still maintain an important position in the regulation of cinema, the increasing availability and circulation of these socially problematic texts leads to the regulation of these films through social networks, rather than necessarily through censorship. That is, calls for the regulation of problematic films are often less likely to be couched as public demands for censorship, and more likely to be a demand for the viewer to reject and revile such images. In this respect, the processes of subjectification lie at the very heart of contemporary film regulation, which directs itself towards 'the conduct of conduct'.[581] Wherein the individual is free to choose the kind of entertainment s/he desires, at least insofar as the law will allow, at the same time s/he becomes ethically responsible both for the choices s/he makes, and for her or his responses to them. In an era of relatively liberal institutional regulation of film then, responsibility for viewing is passed to an

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[581] Rose, (1998)

ostensibly autonomous and 'free' subject, who is nevertheless implored to govern him or herself.[582]

As with the 'media effects' canon more generally, the 'problem' of cinema within popular press and public discussion can not only be seen to revolve around the construction of discrete groups of 'deviant' and/or 'vulnerable' subject-spectators, but in addition, in prescribing a limited set of acceptable affective relations and responses to these problematic texts, these commentaries beseech the viewer to engage with the text in a limited set of ways. As such, one watches these films in a cultural climate that entreats the viewer not only to behave appropriately within the cinema, but also to monitor and control his or her emotional connection to the film.

That is not to say that each and every individual viewer will choose to comply with such prescriptive modes of viewings. Indeed empirical studies of audiences have consistently noted the wide variety of readings and relations that audiences bring to bear upon their chosen texts.[583] In her study of the audience for 'new brutalism' for example, Annette Hill argued that individuals approached these films with a number of "contextual and individual factors" which together helped to "form the viewing experience".[584] These "portfolios of interpretation" she argued, were sufficiently varied that even amongst an identifiable group of individuals who sought out this kind of film, viewers' responses were highly differentiated, and as a result no one singular reaction could be seen to define watching this kind of violence.[585] As such, Hill's work, and the work of audience studies more generally, undermines any notion of a singular spectatorial subject position, by demonstrating the heterogeneity of understandings, interpretations and social uses that different audience members have of and for any given media text.

However, studies that have focussed specifically on fans or genre specific audiences have shown these groups not only to be acutely aware of the kinds of judgements made of their viewing practices by the majority audience, but in some instances the active rejection of such prescriptive modes of reception can be seen to be an important part of the formation of their subcultural identity. Within Annette Hill's study for example, the viewing of these films took place within the context of a "heightened awareness of…the

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[582] Rose, (1999)
[583] See for example, Morley, (1980), Tamar Liebes and Elihu Katz, *The Export of Meaning: Cross-Cultural Readings of Dallas*, 2nd ed., (Cambridge: Polity, 1993), Sonia Livingstone, *Making Sense of Television,* (Oxford: Pergamon, 1990), Ien Ang, *Watching Dallas,* (London: Methuen, 1985)
[584] Hill, (1997), 4-5
[585] Hill, (1997), 27

controversy surrounding the target film and their representations of violence".[586] Participants within the study were therefore not only aware that such films were perceived negatively by certain sections of society, but that this form of entertainment was seen to be a 'social problem'.[587] Viewers therefore, not only appear to go to watch a film like *Wolf Creek* in the context of debates about harm and depictions of sexualised violence against women, but Hill's study suggests that the audience of such films, especially 'fans' of these controversial genres, understand themselves as subjects of the discourse; precisely as these potentially deviant viewers. Although Hill's study demonstrates that participants were keen to reject their categorisation as "strange, disturbed or emotionally deficient",[588] and instead chose to recast themselves as an "intelligent and sophisticated" audience.

By contrast, other studies of explicit or implicit fan communities have shown these audiences to have a more ambiguous relationship to their categorisation as 'problematic viewers'. Indeed as we have already seen within Barker et al's study of the audiences of sexual violence, certain groups of viewers are well aware that their pleasures and their viewing habits are a significant cause for concern amongst mainstream audiences. So while many were keen to dissociate themselves from 'deviant readings' and 'other', pathological viewers of sexual violence, those who embraced *The Last House on the Left,* and exploitation cinema more generally, were more likely to understand themselves as a specific interpretive community who shared a specialised knowledge of the codes and conventions of this 'niche' genre. Moreover, rather than defend themselves against such categorisation, these viewers were far more likely to embrace their own pathologisation by admitting to 'inappropriate responses',[589] or by proclaiming themselves to be 'sick'.[590]

Such self-categorisations, I would suggest, are indicative of a fan's very particular relation with this kind of text. As many researchers have pointed out, fandom itself is a thoroughly pathologised subject position.[591] For Jenkins, the fan "constitutes a scandalous category in contemporary culture, one alternately

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[586] Hill, (1997), 24
[587] Annette Hill, 'Risky Business: Film Violence as an interactive phenomenon', in Stokes and Maltby, (1999), 175
[588] Hill, (1999), 180
[589] Barker et al, (2007), 125
[590] Barker et al, (2007), 95
[591] See for example Hills, (2005) and essays by Joli Jenson, John Fiske and Lawrence Grossberg in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media,* ed. Lisa A. Lewis, (London: Routledge, 1992)

the target of ridicule and anxiety, of dread and desire."[592] Fans transgress boundaries of taste and violate dominant cultural hierarchies, and as a result they are often seen as "abnormal and threatening", "represented as 'other'" and "held at a distance"[593] by both mainstream audiences and by sections of the fan community who are keen to "reassure themselves that their own media consumption is on the normal side of 'the thinly drawn yet sharply policed boundaries between normal and abnormal audience behaviour'."[594] In addition, as Brigid Cherry points out, "viewers of horror films are often equated with dangerous or insane criminals" since successive moral panics have "led to the perception of horror films (and their viewers) as being a danger to society."[595] Being a fan of horror or of exploitation cinema therefore means being aware that one is doubly positioned as a troubling or problematic viewer.

It is not surprising then that in her study of female fans Cherry found that many of the participants refused the label 'fan' or talked about hiding their consumption of these films to the extent they described themselves as being "in the closet".[596] However, embracing one's socially imposed identity as 'sick' or 'inappropriate' may well be a way of asserting a specific form of subcultural identity for those who are well aware that the very act of viewing these films is a resistive act in and of itself. Especially in the case of *The Last House on the Left* which was refused a certificate for cinema release by the BBFC up until 2002, and was not available on video in an uncut form until 2008. Acquiring or gaining access to the film under these circumstances therefore meant breaking the law in many instances. Or at the very least, for those who attended uncut screenings of the film that toured around the UK in the wake of the BBFC's decision to refuse a certificate as recently as 2000,[597] participating in such an event was a deliberate and knowing act of defiance against the regulatory institution. As such, the fan community for such films can arguably be defined through their willingness to resist dominant culture mores, or as Matt Hills puts it in his book *The Pleasures of Horror*:

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[592] Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture,* (London: Routledge, 1992), 15
[593] Jenkins, 1992, 17-19
[594] Brigid Cherry, 'Screaming for release: femininity and horror film fandom in Britain', in *British Horror Cinema*, eds. Steve Chibnall and Julian Petley, (London: Routledge, 2002), quoting John Tulloch and Henry Jenkins, *Science Fiction Audiences: Watching Doctor Who and Star Trek,* (London: Routledge, 1995),
[595] Cherry, (2002), 44
[596] Cherry, (2002), 44 and 45
[597] Mark Kermode, 'Left on the Shelf', *Sight and Sound,* (July 2001), http://www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/feature/404 (accessed 8th May 2011)

> The act of 'enjoying' films that have been censored, denied a classification, or had their general release delayed, therefore needs to be viewed symbolically and performatively…
> 'Watching and enjoying' [film violence] affords fans a route to communicate their subcultural difference and their valued, subcultural transgression of mainstream values.[598]

In Hills' view, pleasure and consumption are performative acts, taking pleasure therefore "is always a cultural act, an articulation of identity: 'I am the sort of person who takes this sort of pleasure in this sort of media product.'"[599] In other words, the viewing of a film is at least a partial enactment of one's identity, and choosing to identify oneself as a fan, or simply as a person who takes pleasure in this kind of controversial film, within public discussions means opening up one's motives and pleasures to public scrutiny. Fans are well aware of the low esteem in which both they and their chosen cultural objects are held, and as such one can read engaging in this kind of a cultural debate as an assertion of identity and cultural authority. As Hills suggests:

> The pleasures of horror…can be analysed as *claims to agency*. They are performative by virtue of arguing for, and constructing, their bearers *as agents who display expertise and authority in relation to horror's texts* – whether this is the authoritative dismissal of horror (as 'perverse', 'weird', 'immoral' and 'unpleasant') enacted by 'anti-fans'…or its equally authoritative championing (as 'art') by fans[600]

In each case then, both the fan and the anti-fan are in engaged in a struggle over the meaning of the text. In the process, they can be seen to construct their identity through their reading of and relation to the text and by drawing on more or less established discourses to assert their distinction from one another.

As Mark Jancovich points out, these discourses are not intended merely to mark out the fan from the non-fan, but rather the display of one's cultural capital can serve to mark the distinction between the long-term 'connoisseurs' of cult horror and the inauthentic teen fans of 'mainstream', commercial horror.[601] `Real' and `authentic' fans, Jancovich suggests, are those who enjoy

> films of violent `excess' whose circulation is usually restricted (and often secret and/or illegal)…They adopt the stance of a radicalized subculture or underground to distance themselves from, and define themselves as superior to, others who they construct as inferior and threatening, a mindless and

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[598] Hills, (2005), 94
[599] Hills, (2005), ix
[600] Hills, (2005), xi
[601] Mark Jancovich, '"A real shocker": authenticity, genre and the struggle for distinction', *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies,* Vol. 14, No.1, (2000), 28-30

conformist horde associated with mass, middlebrow and legitimate culture.[602]

As such, the readings and receptions of the fan audience vary not only in terms of their willingness to identify as a fan, the longevity of their commitment to the genre, and their acquired knowledge both of the genre and of the formal mores for the display of cultural capital within the fan community, but also by social differences such as gender.[603] Such findings shed light on the absolute fallacy of attempting to define a universal spectator, or delimit a singular subject-position created by the text, as even within specific fan communities individuals are keen to differentiate themselves from one another through their display of knowledge and taste. However it is also worth noting the extent to which these 'authentic' fans of the horror genre depend on the discourses of censorship and media effects in order to create a 'rebellious' and 'transgressive' subcultural identity. Or as Matt Hills puts it, "Horror fans may well oppose censorship, but they are also semiotically and subculturally indebted to it."[604]

What I want to propose here however, is that these discussions represent more than the assertion of a social identity. Rather as Steve Bailey argues, they are instances in which the individual can be seen to "produce modes of self-relation, ways of understanding one's position as a social subject and one's relation to the set of institutions, codes, norms and practices", a capacity which depends on "self-reflection and socially enabled self-understanding...in regard to a plurality of codes, institutions and discourses."[605] In this regard, posts that are found on online review sites and forums should be seen not only as a specific textual production of a fan, or more broadly a viewer, identity,[606] but may also be considered to be a place in which the individual cultivates a sense of self in relation to both the film text, and the specific culture which defines the online space. It is important to note therefore, that most of the reviews which follow were sourced from 'mainstream' film sites such as the IMDb.com and EasyCinema.com, where the readership is assumed to be a 'mainstream', commercial audience rather than a fan community. As such, one would expect that the prevailing culture of such sites to be more closely aligned with the views and opinions of the 'majority audience', than with the very specific interpretive communities outlined by Jancovich and Hills.

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[602] Jancovich, (2000), 25-26
[603] See Cherry, (1999) and (2002)
[604] See Hills, (2005), 92
[605] Steve Bailey, Media Audiences and Identity: Self-Construction in the Fan Experience, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 22
[606] See Hills, (2005), 78

This study of the debates that surround *Wolf Creek* then is by no means to be considered an attempt to explore the very specific relations that fans have to the horror genre. Rather, what I want to tease out of these reviews is a sense of precisely how the 'majority audience' understand films of this kind. More specifically, I am concerned with the way in which these mainstream audiences draw on the discourses of media effects in order to develop a model of the pathologised 'other' who takes pleasure in these films. As a result, where fans do air their views, they do so in a context where their pleasure and consumption is defined by those around them as problem. It is my contention that these web-based reviews and discussions can be seen as an attempt to define and delimit the range of 'appropriate' responses to viewing sexualised violence on the screen. As such, these discourses produce a particular, socially sanctioned subject position in relation to the text that operates quite independently of the textual strategies at work within the film itself.

As we shall see, this spectatorial position is created through the construction of what Matt Hills might term an 'imagined subjectivity'. "By regulating what counts as a 'good' subject…imagined subjectivity acts as an extremely powerful cultural device. It can be used to restrict and pathologise specific cultural groups, while promoting the achieved 'normality' and 'legitimate' authority of others."[607] What I want to suggest is that within these 'mainstream' discourses that surround images of sexual and sexualised violence the majority audience consistently draws on their understandings of the media effects canon in order to make a clear distinction between the normal and the pathological. On the one hand, they point to pathological responses, and on the other, they specify particular groups of viewers who are deemed to be troubling. Of course, any given individual is free to resist and refuse such categorisation and/or subject positioning, and as we have already seen research suggests that fan communities tend to define themselves in quite different terms to those proposed by the mainstream. Where fan communities do draw on these discourses, the work of Jancovich and Hills suggests that it is order to mark themselves out as a deliberately transgressive community.

Nevertheless, as Blackman and Walkerdine point out, "the normal/pathological distinction underpinning the construction of Otherness plays a specific role in the ways we relate to, understand and act upon ourselves as

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[607] Hills, (2005), 5

subjects of particular kinds".[608] In this respect, these mainstream discourses can be seen to urge the viewer to reflect on his or her relations to images of sexual and sexualised violence and assess the extent to which those relations might be considered 'normal'. As Hills notes however, the very act of contributing to an online forum is in itself a performative act through which the individual produces their identity, and as such we must be aware of the extent to which individuals produce themselves as 'normal' subjects through their definition of both pathological responses and the pathological 'other'. Or conversely, the extent to which they might, subversively or otherwise, self-categorise as 'sick' or 'deviant' in face of these mainstream audience constructions. In either case, my contention is that the proliferation of 'pathological' categories within mainstream discourses can be understood both as an attempt to regulate viewers' behaviour within the cinema, and as an incitement for viewers to monitor and regulate their relations with the screen.

In my own small scale study of just 4,297 user reviews of some key contemporary 'torture porn' films, *Captivity*,[609] *Chaos*,[610] *Hostel*,[611] *Hostel II*,[612] the recent remake of *Last House on the Left*,[613] *Murder Set Pieces*,[614] *The Devil's Rejects*[615] and *The Hills Have Eyes*,[616] posted on two key sites, IMDb.com and EasyCinema.com, showed that lay understandings of media effects are regularly deployed. For example, as one reviewer of *The Hills Have Eyes* argues:

> The bottom line is films CAN influence people who are already unhinged into desiring to commit unspeakably horrible acts of harm on others. This film is definitely one of them. It crosses the line and makes sane mentally healthy people shudder to think of what ideas it may be giving some unstable, emotionally disturbed people out there. A film like this is adding gasoline to the fire.[617]

And within the user comments for these films more generally, a number of viewers raised the possibility that films like *Hostel I* and *Hostel II*, *The Hills Have Eyes* and the *Devil's Rejects* might inspire others to commit similar acts

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[608] Lisa Blackman and Valerie Walkerdine, *Mass Hysteria: Critical Psychology and Media Studies,* (London: Palgrave, 2001), 115, quoted in Hills, (2005), 5
[609] *Captivity*, directed by Roland Joffe, (USA: After Dark Films, 2007)
[610] *Chaos,* directed by David DeFalco, (USA: Dinsdale Releasing, 2005)
[611] *Hostel,* directed by Eli Roth, (USA: Lions Gate Films, 2005)
[612] *Hostel: Part II,* directed by Eli Roth, (USA: Lions Gate Films, 2007)
[613] *Last House on the Left,* directed by Dennis Illiadis, (USA: Rogue Pictures, 2009)
[614] *Murder Set Pieces*, directed by Nick Palumbo, (USA: TLA Releasing, 2008) (DVD)
[615] *The Devil's Rejects,* directed by Rob Zombie, (USA: Lions Gate Films, 2005)
[616] *The Hills Have Eyes,* directed by Alexandre Aja, (USA: Fox Searchlight Pictures)
[617] nicksthekid, 'IMDB user reviews for The Hills Have Eyes (2006)', http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0454841/usercomments-index?start=0;count=820, (accessed 20th Jun 2009)

themselves, and a large proportion of these expressed particular concern about those who were already 'unstable' or 'disturbed'. As in the case of the BBFC, and the 'media effects' canon, the possibility that a certain group of viewers might become aroused by the depiction was also a key concern, which for one reviewer at least, seemed intrinsically linked to society's descent into violence.

> Firstly let me just say I'm a BIG fan of horror films, but this film and recent films like it, have stepped over the line, they seem to be more about watching people begging for their lives and then dying slowly and painfully, i personally worry MORE about the 'sickos' watching this that are getting off on it...we are becoming more and more numb to the most horrific 'SICKO' style movies, and therefore making our ALREADY violent world even MORE violent[618]

However fear is not simply restricted to a 'deviant' few who may be lurking in the audience, the very question of taking pleasure in viewing these types of films is an enormously problematic one. Indeed the 'imagined' viewer's affective relations are also a cause for considerable concern amongst reviewers. In particular, many of those who reject these films express both horror and dismay in others' perceived enjoyment of viewing violence, rape and torture. As one viewer put it, "Let me start by saying that I think anyone who enjoys this movie should be taken out of society, or heavily medicated...no healthy individual can benefit from viewing these scenes."[619] However, what is most interesting about reading the user reviews of these films is not so much that they reiterate concepts gleaned from 'media effects' debates. Rather it is that these lay understandings of 'media effects' form the foundation of a normative regulation of 'appropriate' spectator-text relations, that is, they seek to define and delimit 'acceptable' forms of consumption by pathologising certain kinds of pleasure and spectatorial response. As such these should be considered as an extension of the regulatory discourses of contemporary cinema, regulation "whose operation is ensured not by right but by technique, not by law but by normalisation."[620] As one comment on Christopher Goodwin's *Sunday Times* article[621] on the "horrifying trend" of "ultraviolent sadism" within Hollywood succinctly put it:

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[618] A Customer from Oxford, 'Disturbing', User comment on 'Hostel', *EasyCinema.com*, http://dvd.easycinema.com/visitor/product_detail.html?product_id=65992, (accessed 20th Jun 2009)

[619] spittle8, 'IMDB user reviews for The Hills Have Eyes (2006)'

[620] Foucault, (1990), 89

[621] Christopher Goodwin, 'Sitting Comfortably?', *The Sunday Times*, 15th April 2007, http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/film/article1642008.ece, (accessed 20th June 2009)

> defenders of these films are in complete denial as to their effect on the viewers…No one is arguing crudely that these films have a direct, causal link to crime but to pretend that we are not abusing ourselves emotionally and spiritually, desensitising ourselves to what should be shocking acts, is to be in complete denial of the truth. None of which is a justification for government censorship, but a plea for self-control, introspection, and regard for moral behaviour[622]

The regulation of film within a liberal political climate is then to be achieved not through the censorship of texts but through *techniques of the self* – specifically, a moral requirement to interrogate one's self in face of these films and to demonstrate both 'self-control' and 'moral behaviour' in our consumption of them. In particular, Mr Rowley suggests that one should ask oneself:

> When you watch a film like Hostel, what do you feel? Revulsion, outrage, nausea, anger, or do you revel in the victims' suffering and secretly wish you were doing the torturing? And when it's all over do you feel uplifted, filled with joy, renewed or do you feel complicit in something dirty, sordid and shameful?[623]

This of course is not merely a question of the viewer's identification. Rather, it is part of what Nikolas Rose might term the 'government of freedom' in which film viewers are scrutinised by one another" and hence, persons are governed "by throwing a web of visibilities, of public codes and private embarrassments over personal conduct: we might term this *government through the calculated administration of shame.*"[624] In reading web reviews of these films it is clear that viewers do scrutinise both the behaviours and responses of others viewing these films. Indeed reviewers frequently recount how the audience responded to the film, sometimes in exacting detail.

The regulation of film therefore, can fruitfully be seen as a form of governmentality in which 'media effects' research has produced a body of knowledge about a certain set of ideologically, psychologically and socially suspect spectator-subjects. And however suspect their findings might be, these discourses are then not only reproduced within legislation, and circulated within public debate, but as Hill's study suggests, these discursive standards of 'normalcy' and 'deviancy', are internalised by individuals, who can be seen to measure their own behaviour and responses against it. As such the discourses of 'media effects' are not limited to institutional debates, but form part of a

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[622] Stephen Rowley, User comment on Christopher Goodwin, 'Sitting Comfortably?'
[623] Stephen Rowley, User comment on Christopher Goodwin, 'Sitting Comfortably?'
[624] Rose, (1999), 73

contemporary 'technology of the self', through which the viewer produces him or herself as a subject-spectator.

The Reception of *Wolf Creek*

Released in 2005, this low budget Australian slasher film tells the story of three young backpackers, two British women and one young Australian man, as they head into the Australian outback to visit Wolf Creek National Park in a run-down car. True to the genre, the car breaks down far from the nearest town and they are forced to accept help from a passing motorist who offers to tow them to his camp and fix the car. However, after passing the time drinking and chatting around a campfire one of the girls awakes to find herself bound and gagged in a shed, and soon discovers the other girl beaten and bloody, tied to a stake while the 'helpful' stranger torments her; threatening to both rape and mutilate her. The girls escape briefly before one is recaptured and the other is killed outright. The film ends bleakly, without resolving the fate of the recaptured girl, as the young man finally wakes up and runs for help, and after a spending a protracted period lost in the bush this 'final boy' is eventually rescued by two tourists.

Funded in part by the True Crime Channel the film claims to be based on true events. The story drew loosely on the cases of Ivan Milat who was convicted of killing seven backpackers during the 1980s and 1990s, and the Snowtown murders largely perpetrated by John Bunting in the 1990s. Despite drawing on these high profile murder cases for inspiration the film was nevertheless fictional. However, at the time of its release the film was refused distribution in the Northern Territory of Australia until after the conclusion of the trial of Bradley John Murdoch for the murder of British backpacker Peter Falconio on the grounds that its subject matter would potentially prejudice the trial. This brief period of censorship clearly lent weight to the film's claims to a realistic portrayal of events.

Within reviews however, these claims that the film was based on true events were a considerable cause for debate. On FilmFocus.co.uk for example, Jennifer Kent suggested that she had "found the claim of a 'true story' repellent

and disingenuous".[625] Similarly, one reviewer on EasyCinema.com suggested that the director's attempt to raise the film's profile "on the basis that its 'based on a true story' is just daft, exploitative bunkum".[626] Although others tried to defend the film by pointing to the cases of Milat, Bunting and Murdoch suggesting that such things can and do happen, as well as defending the film on the grounds of its "realistic approach" rather than its claims to truth.[627] As one contributor put it, "this film is a truly frightening experience and although many of the scenes are fictitious, McLean offers a more realistic approach to the horror genre then many other horrific films that are churned out in the entertainment industry."[628] Indeed, the realist aesthetic of the film was central to many commentators' appreciation of it. As one reviewer put it "at times it feels almost documentary-like"[629] while another suggested that the film was "so realistic and so unflinching in portraying what happens, that you'll feel as if someone was always peeking around a corner with a camera, filming an actual event".[630]

But it was not just the aesthetics of this movie that made it so successful, its status as an independent Australian film was also seen as contributing to its success. As drunkenmaster put it on EasyCinema.com, "this is no Hollywood film",[631] and for many it was precisely the fact that it was not a run-of-the-mill, mainstream Hollywood movie that made it so enjoyable. "The format of this film has been seen many times before, but this time it's the lack of the Hollywood prettiness and production values that works to its benefit".[632] Indeed, one reviewer wondered whether the very fact it had not been made in America had prevented it from slipping into a predictable pastiche, as well as whether "the non-American influence kept this from becoming predictable or familiar in any way".[633]

Nevertheless, the film was not without precedent in US cinema. On the British site EasyCinema.com the film was predominantly likened to *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*,[634] perhaps partly because it too claimed to be based on a

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[625] Jennifer Kent, 'Re:Wolf Creek', user comment on Joe Utichi, 'Wolf Creek', *FilmFocus.co.uk*, http://www.filmfocus.co.uk/review.asp?ReviewID=338, (accessed 8th Jul 2008)
[626] Matthew Canty, 'Impressive, but no fun', User comment on 'Wolf Creek', *EasyCinema.com*, http://dvd.easycinema.com/visitor/product_detail.html?product_id=53429, (accessed 8th Jul 2008)
[627] Timbo, 'Re:Wolf Creek', on *FilmFocus.co.uk*
[628] Timbo, 'Re:Wolf Creek', on *FilmFocus.co.uk*
[629] Melon. 'Terrific indie thriller', on *EasyCinema.com*
[630] cdrucke1, 'IMDb user reviews for Wolf Creek (2005)', The Internet Movie Database, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0416315/usercomments-index?start=0;count=648, (accessed 8th Jul 2008)
[631] drunkenmaster, 'Head-on-a-stick – Sick', on *EasyCinema.com*
[632] A Customer, 'Heart-Pounding', on *EasyCinema.com*
[633] cdrucke1, 'IMDb user reviews for Wolf Creek (2005)'
[634] *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, directed by Tobe Hooper, (USA: Bryanston Distributing, 1974)

true story, but more explicitly because of its gritty depiction of "graphic, sadistic violence" which, for some placed the film squarely "in the same seedy category as such 'classics' as *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *I Spit On Your Grave*",[635] with one reviewer unambiguously suggesting that the film was "Not so much a horror as a video nasty".[636] On IMDB.com on the other hand, the film was not only likened to controversial 1970s films like "*Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *Last House on the Left*",[637] but was situated by numerous contributors within the context of the recent rash of 'torture porn' films, and slasher movies more generally.

The controversy that surrounds *Wolf Creek* has no doubt been heightened by its association with these films. In the press, its inclusion in "a new subgenre of horror films which are so dehumanising, nasty and misogynist that they are collectively known…as 'torture porn'"[638] has marked it out as a particular cause for concern. For David Edelstein, reputedly the man who coined the term 'torture porn', the genre as a whole begs the question of whether there are any "moral uses for this sort of violence?", since they appear to be "so viciously nihilistic that the only point seems to be to force you to suspend moral judgments altogether".[639] While Kira Cochrane's attack on the genre in *The Guardian* is explicitly intended to question whether such depictions ought to have any place within 'entertainment' cinema. But even the term 'torture porn' represents an attempt to stigmatize these films through its juxtaposition of extreme violence and graphic sexuality. From the very outset, the term invites questions about how such films are consumed by the audience, and problematises the kinds of 'pleasures' that might be found within the genre. For Cochrane the central problem with the 'torture porn' genre is that "these films flag up the prospect of watching a nubile young woman being tortured as a genuinely pleasurable experience". More precisely, it is the consumption of such images of violence against women by young male audiences that is the problem. Cochrane therefore not only questions "who would seek out this experience as entertainment?", but answers her own rhetorical question by mobilising the 'media effects' debates:

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[635] A Customer, 'Fair Dinkum? Not!', on *EasyCinema.com*
[636] Matthew Canty, 'Impressive, but no fun', on *EasyCinema.com*
[637] cdrucke1, 'IMDb user reviews for Wolf Creek (2005)'
[638] Kira Cochrane, 'For Your Entertainment', *Guardian.co.uk*, 1 May 2007, http://film.guardian.co.uk/features/featurepages/0,,2069286,00.html, (accessed 4th Jul 2008)
[639] David Edelstein, 'Now playing at your local multiplex: Torture Porn', *New York Magazine,* 28th Jan 2006, http://nymag.com/movies/features/15622/, (accessed 24th June 2010)

Of course, watching one of these films won't turn a sane, decent individual into a killer or a torturer, but you have to wonder what effect this widespread meshing of sexuality and graphic violence will have on the young men at whom they are primarily aimed.[640]

Other reviewers like Nigel Floyd of *TimeOut London*, defended the film by suggesting that conflating "Greg McLean's fiercely intelligent *Wolf Creek*"[641] with other examples of the genre such as *The Devil's Rejects*[642] or *Turistas*[643] was "at best sloppy, at worst misleading and prejudicial". Nevertheless, the likening of *Wolf Creek* to films and genres specifically implicated in 'media effects' research clearly provides a discursive framework within which popular debate about the film takes place. Indeed, discussion about the film is dominated both by the sadism and violence of the film as well as its capacity to provoke deeply visceral and affective responses within the viewer. And whether viewers liked or loathed the film, in the main they agreed with Rich Cline from shadowsonthewall.co.uk that the film was "gut-wrenchingly awful to watch – horrifyingly violent, stomach-churningly gruesome and soaked in inevitable tragedy".[644]

Among professional reviews of the film listed on RottenTomatoes.com, opinion appears to be fairly evenly divided among those who embraced and those who rejected the film.[645] However, within the wider context of web based reception, it is Roger Ebert that has become the figurehead of those who denounced the film outright. In his review, he famously gave a zero star rating to the film and condemned it as a "sadistic celebration of pain and cruelty".[646] And this indictment of the film is raised numerous times by both professional reviewers and web forum participants.[647] Ebert's review of the film is instructive

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[640] Kira Cochrane, 'For Your Entertainment',
[641] Nigel Floyd, 'Could critics of 'torture porn' at least watch the movies?', *TimeOut London*, http://www.timeout.com/film/features/show-feature/3058/, (accessed 4th July 2008)
[642] *The Devil's Rejects*, directed by Rob Zombie, (USA: Lions Gate Films, 2005)
[643] *Turistas*, directed by John Stockwell, (USA: Fox Atomic, 2006)
[644] Rich Cline, 'Wolf Creek', *ShadowsontheWall.co.uk*, http://www.shadowsonthewall.co.uk/05/wolfcree.htm, (accessed 8th Jul 2008)
[645] 'Wolf Creek', *RottenTomatoes.com*, http://uk.rottentomatoes.com/m/wolf_creek/, (accessed 8th Jul 2008)
[646] Roger Ebert, 'Wolf Creek', *rogerebert.com*, http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20051222/REVIEWS/51220004/1023, (accessed 20th Aug 2006)
[647] See for example, 'Wolf Creek', *PopcornPictures.co.uk*, http://www.popcornpictures.co.uk/wfilms/wolfcreek.shtml, (accessed 8th Jul 2008); Red Robbie Mackenzie, 'Howls of Horror at Wolf Creek', *Netribution.co.uk*, http://netribution.co.uk/stories/34/226-howls-of-horror-at-wolf-creek, (accessed 13th Jun 2010); James Berardinelli, 'Wolf Creek', *Reelviews.net*, http://www.reelviews.net/movies/w/wolf_creek.html, (accessed 8th Jul 2008); 'Wolf Creek', *Cinematical.com*, http://www.cinematical.com/2006/01/02/review-wolf-creek/, (accessed 6th Jul 2008); Eugene Novikov, 'Wolf Creek', *FilmBlather.com*,

here, partly because it is central to many web reviewers' discussions of the film, but also because his review reactivates many of the same points he raised against films like *I Spit On Your Grave*,[648] and the more general category of what he termed the 'woman in danger' film in his famous article in *American Film* 'Why Movie Audiences Aren't Safe Anymore'.[649] The point of view that Ebert specifically lays out in these articles is clearly informed by the 'media' effects' tradition, as he claims that viewing such films fostered in the audience rape and violence against women.[650] Moreover, after watching the audience laugh and shout encouragement at the screen during the course of the rape scenes in *I Spit On Your Grave*, Ebert concluded that the audience of the film were nothing more nor less than "vicarious sex criminals".[651] The value of Ebert's contribution to the debate over *Wolf Creek* therefore extends beyond the fact that these two articles have become central to academic discussions of both the slasher and the rape-revenge genre.[652] Rather Ebert's condemnation of the film *Wolf Creek* is implicitly informed by the 'media effects' debates, and as such represents a key instance in which the model of spectatorship formulated within these debates is mobilised within contemporary discussions of cinema.

For Ebert, *Wolf Creek* was a film was so repugnant in its display of misogynistic torture and violence that he "wanted to walk out of the theatre and keep on walking".[653] Though evidently he stayed to the end, visiting the movie review site RottenTomatoes.com after the screening "not for tips for my own review but hoping that someone somewhere simply said, "Made me want to vomit and cry at the same time."[654] For Ebert there was only one ideological perspective to take on this film, and that is to see it as he does: as "brutal",

http://www.filmblather.com/review.php?n=wolfcreek, (accessed 6th Jul 2008); 'IMDb user reviews for Wolf Creek (2005)'; 'Wolf Creek', *JoBlo.com*, http://www.joblo.com/forums/showthread.php?p=2061047, (accessed 24th June 2010); 'roger ebert can eat ****', R*ottenTomatoes*, http://www.rottentomatoes.com/vine/showthread.php?t=454323, (accessed 24th June 2010); 'Ebert reviews Wolf Creek', *HorrorSpeak,* http://www.horrorspeak.com/ubbthreads/showflat.php/Cat/0/Number/128029/an/0/page/69, (accessed 24th June 2010)
[648] Roger Ebert, 'I Spit on Your Grave', *rogerebert.com,* http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/19800716/REVIEWS/7160301/1023, (accessed 10th Jul 2008)
[649] Roger Ebert, 'Why Movie Audiences Aren't Safe Anymore', *American Film*, 6, no.5 (March 1981)
[650] Ebert, (1981), 54
[651] Roger Ebert, 'I Spit on Your Grave'
[652] For example see Peter Lehman, '"Don't Blame this on the Girl": female rape revenge films', *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema*, ed Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark, (London: Routledge, 1993); Carol Clover, *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*, (London: BFI, 1992); and Boyle, (2005)
[653] Ebert, 'Wolf Creek'
[654] Ebert, 'Wolf Creek'

"misogynistic" and "sadistic"; recoverable neither in terms of its genre nor in terms of a discussion about the role of violence in film.

What is most interesting about his review however, is the way in which he attempts to sway the opinion of the reader. More specifically, he reinforces his own ideological perspective with a clear attempt to stigmatise those viewers who may not reject the film outright as he did. "To laugh through the movie, as midnight audiences are sometimes invited to do, is to suggest you are dehumanised, unevolved, or a slackwit…If anyone you know says this is the one they want to see, my advice is: Don't know that person no more."[655] Laughter for Ebert, is not only an 'inappropriate' response to this film, it is a serious cause for concern. One should note of course, that unlike his previous encounter while watching *I Spit On Your Grave*, Ebert didn't actually see any audience members laughing. Instead his condemnation is targeted at those who might laugh under other circumstances. Moreover, Ebert attempts to reinforce his judgement of this sort of behaviour by denouncing those who might respond in this way as "dehumanised, unevolved or a slackwit". Here Ebert not only disparages the audience and their potential responses but goes on to suggest that readers impose social sanctions on their friends and acquaintances for simply expressing a desire to see the movie. As such, we can clearly see that Ebert attempts to employ the language of inadequacy and deviancy as a normative strategy designed on the one hand to stigmatize and sanction those who want to see the film, and on the other hand to designate profoundly 'inappropriate' reactions and responses to the film for the audience.

For Ebert then, this is not exactly a debate about 'violence against women' and nor is it a call for censorship. Ebert's review represents something else. It is an attempt to achieve the suppression of this film through the exertion of normative social, and possibly interpersonal, pressure. As the reviewer for popcornpictures.co.uk points out however, Ebert's condemnation of the film ultimately backfired by raising the profile of the film, and getting fans of the genre "chomping at the bit to see [it]".[656] Nevertheless, Ebert's review represents an important contribution to the cultural context in which the film was viewed. A context in which choosing to see this film invites questions about one's motives and desires as well as one's mental health.

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[655] Ebert, 'Wolf Creek'
[656] 'Wolf Creek', *PopcornPictures.co.uk*, http://www.popcornpictures.co.uk/wfilms/wolfcreek.shtml, (accessed 8th Jul 2008)

Looking at the wider debates about *Wolf Creek,* the issue of how one ought to respond, indeed how one ought to feel, resurfaces time and time again. The issue of laughter arises quite regularly, with both defenders and detractors agreeing that laughter would be completely inappropriate, while feeling physically ill and emotionally disturbed are, on the whole, defined as the way you 'should' or 'ought' to feel. But further, within user reviews of 'torture porn' films more generally there is at least anecdotal evidence that audience responses are not simply being defined in the public domain, they are actively being monitored and policed. That is laughing in the wrong places can not only garner the disapproval of the rest of the audience, but can get you evicted from the cinema:

> I was disturbed (in certain ways) by the film, but not because of the film itself, but because 2 people in the theater I saw it in repeatedly laughed at several scenes which were not funny at all. It took laughing at a helpless woman wearing her husband's face and running for her life to get these guys kicked out.[657]

Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that viewers are not only aware that they are expected to respond appropriately to these films, but that they may well modify their behaviour accordingly. "Who cares if no one else is seeing this? If you're watching this alone you can laugh and cheer out loud all you want. So check your sense of morals and compassion at the door and rock and roll with the Firefly family one more time."[658] So while Mike from Jersey suggests that an empty theatre might be a good thing since it will allow him to shrug off this social pressure and enjoy the film in his own way, there is also a suggestion here that he does actually feel the need to reign in those responses in the company of others.

To return to the specific case of *Wolf Creek* however, within both professional and amateur reviews there is a clear struggle to define 'appropriate' models of behaviour. One critic who explicitly challenged Ebert's summation of the film for example, suggested that Ebert had misunderstood the audience. In contrast to Ebert, James Berardinelli suggested that the audience for this film was more appropriately characterised as a "horror fan - or a parent desperate to drive home the advice not to speak to strangers" rather than the 'dehumanised', 'unevolved' 'slackwits' in Ebert's review. Moreover, Berardinelli argued that "if the film evokes squeamishness, it has done its job. You're not supposed to sit

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[657] Patrick DeVere, 'IMDb user reviews for The Devil's Rejects (2005)', *The Internet Movie Database,* http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0395584/usercomments-index?, (accessed 20th June 2009)
[658] Mike from Jersey, 'IMDb user reviews for The Devil's Rejects (2005)'

through a film like this placidly munching popcorn. The reaction is intended to be visceral."[659] While Berardinelli clearly disagrees with Ebert, he nevertheless takes pains to define 'inappropriate' behaviour in the audience. That is, 'placidly munching popcorn' while watching this kind of film, is simply something you are not "supposed to" do. As such, Berardinelli's contribution to the debate over *Wolf Creek* does not represent a struggle over the 'meaning' or the 'appropriate' interpretation of the film as such, but a debate over the constitution of appropriate forms of spectatorship. So where Ebert constructs an 'imagined other' as mentally, intellectually or emotionally deficient, and/or 'mysogynistic', Berardinelli attempts to 'recover' the film by providing 'legitimate' reasons for watching and 'liking' the film.

However, Ebert was not the only critic to express concern about both the film and its 'imagined audience'. Tyler Hanley a critic from Palo Alto online also suggests that the film is "pointless, nauseating cinema" and that "Viewers eager to embrace 90 minutes of footage featuring women being brutalized, beaten, stalked and slaughtered may want to consider some serious introspection".[660] Like Ebert, Hanley clearly attempts to stigmatize those who want to see the film. The implication being that there is clearly something wrong with an individual who is eager to see the film, to the extent that such an individual should consider "some serious introspection".[661] The movie in fact, does not actually feature 90 minutes of brutal violence against women. Indeed, the first half of the film is devoted to character development. Nevertheless, Hanley's comments clearly draw on the discourse of media effects in suggesting a connection between a desire to see the film and 'deviancy' or abnormality within the individual. Hanley therefore, clearly problematises the viewer's relation to the text, suggesting that "embracing" this movie is, in itself, a problem. She stops short of suggesting therapy in this instance, but clearly advocates a personal interrogation of one's motives for seeing the film. The implication, of course, is that not only should the reader reconsider their eagerness to see the film, but that they should examine the roots of that eagerness in an effort to bring their desires, perhaps even their subjectivity, into line with a more balanced, more normal, more socially appropriate view of the world.

Similarly, viewers like jeffrsun, posting on IMDb.com writes:

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[659] James Berardinelli, 'Wolf Creek', *Reelviews.net*, http://www.reelviews.net/movies/w/wolf_creek.html, (accessed 8th Jul 2008)
[660] Tyler Hanley, 'Wolf Creek', Palo Alto Online, 30th Dec 2005, http://paloaltoonline.com/movies/moviescreener.php?id=002299&type=long, (accessed 1st Mar 2007)
[661] Hanley, 'Wolf Creek'

> This film is disturbing…It made me sick to my stomach. It
> made me ask my friend to walk out…[It is] simply sophisticated
> sick violence…that is not good for your brain to be exposed to.
> If you played a part in the making of this movie, you are a truly
> sick individual… I'm embarrassed to tell people I saw this
> movie, and if you know someone who thought this was cool, I
> would stay away from them.[662]

Jeffrsun clearly reiterates Ebert's perspective on both the content and the acceptability of the film, by labelling both the violence and the members of the production crew as "sick". Jeffrsun then, like Ebert, attempts to reinforce his ideological perspective on the film by both stigmatising, members of the crew, as well as suggesting the use of social sanctions against those who may have thought the film was "cool". Once again, jeffrsun's understanding of the problem with this kind of film is rooted in the media effects tradition as he suggests the viewing this kind of material "is not good for your brain to be exposed to"; implying, of course, that those people who though it was "cool" have, somehow, been irreparably damaged. The metaphorical 'sickness' with which he condemns the violence and the crew, is therefore equated with a real physiological and/or psychological illness, and yet discrete from the 'sickness' he himself endured while viewing the film, which represents a 'normal' physiological rejection of the film.

What is clear when looking at these debates about *Wolf Creek* the issue of how one ought to respond, indeed, how one ought to feel, resurfaces time and time again. The issue of laughter arises quite regularly; with both defenders and detractors agreeing that laughter would be completely inappropriate, while feeling physically ill and emotionally disturbed are, on the whole, defined as the way you 'should' or 'ought' to feel. But where for some this reaction is read as an indication that the viewer is appropriately aligned with the ideological thrust of the film (that is, that one is 'appropriately' disgusted by scenes of sexual violence), for others, like Ebert and jeffrsun, this feeling of revulsion is more appropriately directed towards a rejection of the film as a whole.

Within these web-based forums that are targeted at a mainstream, commercial audience, rather than a niche group of horror fans, the question of "how people can 'enjoy' this"[663] is raised repeatedly, especially by those who rated the film poorly. However, it was not just those who rejected the film that

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[662] jeffrsun, 'IMDb user reviews for Wolf Creek (2005)'
[663] meh, user Comment on Dan Jolin, 'Wolf Creek' 1st Jun 2007, *EmpireOnline*,
http://www.empireonline.com/reviews/reviewcomplete.asp?DVDID=116928, (accessed 10th Jul 2008)

questioned the motives of others, MDL, posting on the site of the British movie magazine site Empire, gave the film four out of five stars, but nevertheless began her comment; "I saw this film with three friends. Afterward, two of them shrugged and said, 'Meeh.' I think I need to get new friends".[664] What is interesting about MDL's comment is that it is situated within the context of her own clearly signalled appreciation of the film. Her questioning of her friends' responses in this instance, unlike those of Ebert, Hanley or jeffrsun, is not couched in terms of who would go to see such a film, or even who would like it. Rather it is their indifference in face of the movie that is a cause for concern. It is that they have failed in MDL's view to engage with the film on an appropriate affective level, seeing it as she did as "horrifying and cruel".[665]

Violent films like *Wolf Creek* clearly problematise certain kinds of relations with the text, and as I have sought to argue throughout this chapter, the problem of the 'imagined' spectator is rooted in the 'media effects' debates. Nowhere is this more true than in one comment written by a woman named Josie on the *TimeOut London* website, that deserves to be quoted in full:

> I did not find this movie scary. It is undeniably full of tension, but my over-riding emotion was one of anger and sadness that sexual violence towards women can be seen as entertainment. Shame on the director that he would apply his talents to such degrading images of women. What the hell would motivate him to put what are, after all, his very disturbing fantasies onto film, perpetuating the disgusting myth held by so many men that women exist to be abused. I am sure the director would not deny that many sick minded men would in fact find scenes in this film a turn on. We know that such men exist and thrive on violent pornography and snuff movies. Why would you want to bring this kind of thing to the masses. The only scary thing about this movie is what it shows us of mens imaginations, and how acceptable violence towards women really is in society. We all, as women, know how terrifying it would feel to be so abused, we do not need to have it so graphically portrayed in the name of entertainment. Shame on you Greg McClean. Whatever your good intentions for the film, however 'artistic', for me and many many other women you have failed, and that saddens and scares me more than any so called horror film ever could.[666]

Josie's fear is clearly rooted in the idea that this kind of representation will perpetuate the myth that abuse and violence against women is acceptable or even 'normal' within society. Debates about whether *Wolf Creek* does, or even

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[664] MDL, "Harsh", on *EmpireOnline*
[665] MDL, "Harsh", on *EmpireOnline*
[666] Josie, user comment on Chris Tilly, 'Wolf Creek – Q&A with Greg McLean', *Time Out London,* 16th Sept 2005, http://www.timeout.com/film/news/644.html, (accessed 10th Feb 2008)

attempts to perpetuate this idea notwithstanding, what is most interesting about Josie's argument is the way in which she reinforces it with respect to the 'potentially abnormal or deviant viewers' of the film: the "sick minded men" who would "find scenes in this film a turn on".[667]

Josie's dismay is clearly rooted in a concern for how the viewing of such a film will affect specifically male, viewers. Josie's argument against such depictions is clearly born out of a belief that watching sexual violence on the screen can have real social effects. Her condemnation of the film then, centres around the idea that 'normal' women – who already "know how terrifying it would feel to be so abused"[668] - may fall victim to the 'sick minded men' who 'thrive on violent pornography and snuff movies' and would 'find scenes in this film a turn on'.[669] In this respect, women and men are constructed as diametrically opposed, both in their relation to 'abuse', and in their response to the film. Women are the victims of violence and abuse, while men are clearly implicated as the perpetrators, given that 'men's imaginations' gives rise to 'very disturbing fantasies' about the acceptability of such behaviour within society.

However Josie's fear is not restricted to the possibility of direct 'media effects', her comment mobilises very real fears about appropriate relations with the screen. In this respect Josie specifically speaks "as a woman"[670] and clearly differentiates between her own 'normal' response to the film, which was one of anger, sadness and fear – and that of the ultimate pathologised 'other', the 'sick-minded man' who will exhibit the ultimate 'deviant' response and become aroused. Josie therefore clearly constructs 'womens'' terror at the thought of abuse as the 'normal' response to this movie, while the 'deviancy' she identifies in the director's "disturbing fantasies" and "men's imaginations" more generally, is obviously seen as a quality of the 'male gaze'. The slippage between the 'sick minded men' and 'men' more generally, is clearly indicated in her fears about bringing "this kind of thing to the masses", as well as in her assertion that "so many men" believe in the myth "that women exist to be abused".[671]

But while Josie's views may be quite reactionary, and her argument overly simplistic, what Josie's comment makes explicit are some of the gendered assumptions that are implicit in many other reviews and discussions. That the film may be viewed by those who are 'sick-minded' – the sexual deviant

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[667] Josie, on *Time Out London*
[668] Josie, on *Time Out London*
[669] Josie, on *Time Out London*
[670] Josie, on *Time Out London*
[671] Josie, on *TimeOut London*

or otherwise deficient individual who gets his kicks from watching violence against women. That watching this sort of violence will harm the viewer and/or society, either by perpetuating the myth that violence against women is 'normal'.[672] Or that the image will physically damage a person[673] leading otherwise 'normal' men to commit acts of violence.[674] All of which are built on the public perception of the media effects debates.

What is more, Josie's construction of the 'imagined' spectator-subject of films like *Wolf Creek* as being 'sick', 'twisted' or 'deviant' is clearly the dominant model within public debate. As such, when participating in a mainstream, commercial web-forum those people who like and appreciate such films must situate themselves in relation to this model, either but defending themselves and their pleasures against such accusations, or by appropriating such terms. Commenting on a very positive review of *Wolf Creek* on Mermaid Heather's blog for example Jed Cooper suggested that:

> One thought kept going through my "sick puppy" mind while watching this flick once it sped up - this is very real world ... I can easily see this happening for real… But what I can not figure out is ... how can such a pretty, intelligent, athletic, sweet young thing have such a sick, twisted, perverted mind like me (smiling and clapping).[675]

Similarly, one commentator on IMDB.com pointed out "sick puppy that I am, was hoping to see the "head on a stick" carried out a little more"[676] while another admitted "I like walking out of the theater asking myself 'why did I just watch that?' And 'am I a sick monkey for enjoying it?'".[677] What these comments suggest is not only that these commentators understand how their pleasures and their comments will be understood by very many others, but in the case of Subovon in particular s/he clearly demonstrates that s/he is actively engaged in a process of introspection, and interrogation about his or her own motives for engagement with the text, and pleasures s/he finds there.

Moreover, these are not isolated cases. It would seem that many of those who do actually appreciate films like *Wolf Creek* do in some way reflect on their own responses, question the source of their own pleasure and situate themselves in relation to discourses that construct their enjoyment of such

[672] Josie, on *TimeOut London*
[673] jeffrsun, 'IMDb user reviews for Wolf Creek (2005)'
[674] Ebert, (1981)
[675] Jed Cooper, user comment on Heather Santrous, 'Wolf Fever', *MermaidHeather,* 26th Feb 2006, http://mermaidheather.blogspot.com/2006/02/wolf-fever.html, (accessed 24th June 2010)
[676] vvalenescu, 'IMDb user reviews for Wolf Creek (2005)'
[677] Subovon, 'IMDb user reviews for Wolf Creek (2005)'

movies as 'deviant' and sick. Within reviews of the film, the problem of enjoyment resurfaces time and time again. Michelle Thomas writing for FutureMovies.co.uk for example, reflects "a few weeks ago I was surprised and dismayed by how much I enjoyed *The Devil's Rejects*. My reaction to *Wolf Creek* reassures me that I'm neither sick nor twisted".[678] And similarly, Ethan Alter of the *Film Journal International* suggests the difficulty in finding pleasure in a film like *Wolf Creek* is that, "the people who do appreciate the movie (you can't really use the word "enjoy" when talking about a film like this) will find themselves on the defensive, explaining how they can recommend something that's so cruel, it's almost painful to watch."[679] Indeed even Nigel Floyd of *TimeOut* admits that, "being a specialist horror film critic has its perils. Whenever the genre enters one of its grislier phases, female friends start to question how a seemingly feminist-friendly man could enjoy and write about such apparently misogynist fare."[680] Although these critics clearly had a different view of the film, what they share is an understanding that 'enjoyment' in the context of a bloody, brutal and violent film is not only personally problematic, but is likely to elicit significant criticism from one's peers, precisely on the grounds that it may indicate that one is either "sick and twisted" or potentially "misogynist".

In addition, reviewers and commentators frequently claim to feel guilty about taking pleasure in films like *Wolf Creek* which suggests not only a significant degree of reflection on their own engagement with the text, but that they somehow find themselves falling short of some internally conceptualised standard. As Nathan Rabin, writer for avclub.com puts it, "*Wolf Creek* is the kind of well-executed sleazefest that makes audiences feel not just creeped-out but downright dirty".[681] While customers at EasyCinema.com were less ambiguous in their expressions of guilt:

> This has to now be in my top 10 fave Horror flicks and i guess
> (even though it somehow feels wrong)[682]

> Graphic, sadistic violence perpetrated on the three friends in
> this film left me feeling slightly guilty about watching the story
> unfold[683]

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[678] Michele Thomas, 'Wolf Creek Movie Review', *FutureMovies.co.uk*, http://www.futuremovies.co.uk/review.asp?ID=374, (accessed 10 Feb 2008)
[679] Ethan Alter, 'Wolf Creek', *Film Journal International,* http://www.filmjournal.com/filmjournal/esearch/article_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1001772498, (accessed 10 Feb 2008)
[680] Nigel Floyd, 'Could critics of 'torture porn' at least watch the movies?'
[681] Nathan Rabin, 'Wolf Creek', *AV Club*, http://www.avclub.com/content/node/44035, (accessed 10th Jul 2008)
[682] A Customer, 'Heart-Pounding', on *EasyCinema.com*
[683] A Customer, 'Fair Dinkum? Not!', on *EasyCinema.com*

> The result is gritty, uncomfortable and one almost feels guilty for watching...[684]

> Difficult to watch, but impossible not to be impressed with, this is either going to be a viewers' guilty pleasure, or an instant turn off. Me, well I watched it twice.[685]

While the sheer number of expressions of guilt about viewing and enjoying the film *Wolf Creek* found on this single site was in itself remarkable, it is a customer review of *Hostel* that perhaps sheds the most light on why individuals would feel the need to express this guilt publicly. "It's a real treat of a film!!!!! Rent it! Enjoy! I did, no soul searching about did I/how I / enjoyed it, I just enjoyed a visceral roller coaster of thrills".[686]

What this customer's comment clearly suggests is that s/he is aware of a prevailing social expectation that one ought to engage in some level of soul searching about whether and how s/he enjoyed the film. Despite having refused to engage in this process, the fact that the review is couched in these terms suggests that this person is situating his or her pleasures within the context of a cultural climate in which the individual is implored to interrogate his or her engagement with such texts. The fact that s/he feels the need to tell others that s/he simply refused to do this may be seen as a resistive act. In refusing to justify his or her pleasure on a public forum, we might see this customer as talking to those who may feel guilty, or who feel they ought to feel guilty, for taking pleasure in such films. This one customer is then, in some sense, attempting to give this group of viewers permission not to feel forced into introspection, but to simply rent and enjoy the film.

Moreover this problematisation of 'enjoyment', and the concomitant experience of guilt during and after viewing, is not restricted to *Wolf Creek,* rather it extends to the 'genre' more generally. Indeed, many user reviews of 'torture porn' suggested that while they had not abandoned taking pleasure in viewing these films, their relationship to the film is experienced through the lens of social pressure and cultural disapproval. Commenting on *The Hills Have Eyes* for example, Ian Davies suggests that it is "not the kind of film you can admit to enjoying, but one that could easily be classed as a guilty pleasure".[687] The implicit threat of social censure therefore appears to lead to individuals

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[684] HalB, 'Uncomfortable Viewing', on *EasyCinema.com*

[685] drunkenmaster, 'Head-on-a-stick – Sick', on *EasyCinema.com*

[686] A Customer, 'Rent this superb film', User comment on 'Hostel', *EasyCinema.com*

[687] Ian Davies, 'The Hills Have Loads of Body Parts......', User comment on 'The Hills Have Eyes, *EasyCinema.com*
http://dvd.easycinema.com/visitor/product_detail.html?product_id=64986#customer_reviews, (accessed 20th Jun 2009)

being somewhat circumspect in admitting to taking pleasure in viewing this kind of film. Surprisingly, it also led one British viewer to offer advice on how best to enjoy not only a socially problematic but banned film *Murder Set Pieces,* without having to face difficult questions about one's viewing habits. "This is a guilty pleasure, a film that makes you sit with the remote control in case somebody walks into the room while you're watching it. You don't want to try explaining this film to a non-horror fan. Trust me, they won't get it."[688] And as this review suggests, claims to have enjoyed such films are often bracketed off as a pleasure that only a fellow horror fan, or gorehound could understand.

> I read someone's post that thought Eli Roth should be tried for murder as "only a psychopath could even think of this" HAHAHAHAHA sorry but that's funny! The movie was NOT targeted at your type of audience, so go back to watching steel magnolias and leave the horror for us!...So as for everyone who didn't like it or think it's just plain wrong...there are us twisted sick F***'s who enjoyed it! and WE are who it's truly made for....[689]

While all of these comments can be seen to resist other viewers' normative construction of the film and its 'imagined' spectatorial pleasures as deviant, many of these reviewers nevertheless position themselves in relation to this 'dominant model'. That is, within the context of a mainstream, commercial website, targeted at the 'majority' audience, these reviewers produce themselves as the 'deviant other' whose enjoyment and pleasure is a cause for concern. So while these horror fans may well discuss the film and themselves in entirely different terms within the context of a horror fan forum, within the confines of the IMDb, they show an awareness of the assumptions and prejudices that surround their pleasures. So while DVD_Connoisseur's awareness of the problematic nature of this highly controversial film leads him/her to suggest hiding one's consumption of it from those who are not already part of this interpretive community, bowerqueen takes a different tack. Rather than offer up strategies by which the fan community might enjoy their pleasures without social censure, she chooses instead to address the mainstream audience, defending both the film and those who enjoy it against criticism. As such she simultaneously, attacks the pathologisation of the

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[688] DVD_Connoisseur from England, 'IMDb user reviews for Murder Set Pieces (2004), *The Internet Movie Database,* http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0422779/usercomments-index?start=0;count=111, (accessed 20th Jun 2009)

[689] bowerqueen2002, 'IMDb user reviews for Hostel II', *The Internet Movie Database,* http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0498353/usercomments?count=357&start=335, (accessed 20th Jun 2009)

filmmaker at the same time as she appropriates a 'deviant' identity as a twisted sick F***, as both a symbol of her fandom and as a defiant act.

And this is no isolated case. Among the 4,297 reviews just under 3% of users made comments that explicitly suggested that their sense of identity and/or subjectivity had been shaped by these normalising discourses. Of that 3%, 30 individuals acknowledged or appropriated the construction of their pleasures as sick or deviant, as bowerqueen does; 27 viewers questioned their sense of self in face of unexpected responses and pleasures, (for example "What sort of person am I that I rent these things and enjoy them?!?!"[690]); and 55 expressed guilt, shame, feeling dirty and/or like they wanted to take a shower after having watched one of these films. But unlike the somewhat resistive act of classifying the film as a 'guilty pleasure', many of the reviewers claimed to have experienced this shame on a deeply subjective level. As one reviewer put it, "I watched the movie Chaos alone and regret it deeply...I actually couldn't move at one point during the film because I was in shock. I felt ashamed and horrified that I was watching this all alone..."[691] While another reviewer suggests, "I hated myself for getting a thrill out of it...."[692] Although there is significant variation between the films: awareness of one's construction as sick, for example was most strongly associated with *Murder Set Pieces*; while expressions of guilt and shame, as well as the questioning of one's subjectivity was most strongly associated with *Last House on the Left* and *The Devil's Rejects*.

What all this seeks to suggest is that individuals who enjoy 'torture porn' films not only understand themselves as subjects within a wider discursive framework informed by the 'media effects' canon, but that within the context of a mainstream, commercial website like IMDb they actively situate themselves and their pleasure in relation to this discourse, albeit in various different ways. Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that in this context individuals experience some degree of social or cultural pressure to interrogate their own motives and pleasures in watching these films, and to modify their behaviour in

[690] A Customer from North Yorkshire, 'Oops', User Comment on 'The Devil's Rejects', *EasyCinema.com*, http://dvd.easycinema.com/visitor/product_detail.html?product_id=53548#customer_reviews, (accessed 20th Jun 2009)

[691] Tddupb00, 'IMDb user reviews for Chaos (2005)', *The Internet Movie Database,* http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0405977/usercomments-index?start=0;count=55, (accessed 20th Jun 2009)

[692] bkmcgee, 'IMDb user reviews for The Devils Rejects (2005)', *The Internet Movie Database,* http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0395584/usercomments-index?start=0;count=649, (accessed 20th Jun 2009)

face of such widespread suspicion about those who enjoy such films. However, given the sheer volume of people who report feeling guilty, ashamed or dirty for enjoying these films, there is a clear suggestion that the normative standards produced by these discourses are being internalised by at least some viewers. These mainstream discourses then can be seen to be successful in not only constituting a model of 'appropriate' affective relations, but what this research suggests is that the scrutiny of the majority audience has the capacity to shape the way in which individuals understand themselves as subjects. So while those who 'enjoy' such films may not simply accept their position as a 'deviant other', the language of pathology that surrounds certain kinds of pleasures in relation to these films can be seen to influence the kinds of spectatorial subjectivity that viewers adopt in relation to depictions of sexual and sexualised violence

Conclusion

My concern in this chapter has been to examine the construction and circulation of what Barker et al might term 'figures of the audience',[693] and to explore how these figures might influence the regulation of contemporary cinema. My contention throughout has been that these 'figures' pervade not only the 'official' discourses of 'media effects', regulatory debates and recent legislation, but that these 'figures' are also consistently constructed and referred to within the wider, popular discourses of cinema. That is, in discussions of culturally problematic films both professional critics and members of the public can be seen to draw on their assumed knowledge of these 'imagined' spectators in order to justify their vilification of these films. In this regard, I have sought to demonstrate that these 'figures of the audience' are not necessarily consistent with real viewers' reception of and responses to certain kinds of media content, but rather they are subject positions that are consistently constructed through multiple discourses in order to justify both the statutory regulation of cinema, and

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[693] Barker et al, (2007), 191

the informal social control that viewers themselves attempt to exert over one another.

I have sought to show that despite the fact that 'media effects' research has scarcely proven that violent media causes quantifiable effects within the social world, the behaviourist model upon which many of these studies rely has nevertheless exerted a profound influence on the cultural context in which film regulation takes place. As we have seen, concern about the suitability of certain media forms has increasingly become less a question of the text's intrinsic qualities of indecency and/or offensiveness, and has become more a question of the text's assumed effect upon the spectator. Such a shift may very well be positive in so far as it accepts the social and historical specificity of such judgements. However, the assumed spectator of any given text, both within the context of UK legislation and regulation, and in the wider context of 'harm' proposed by the 'media effects' research, is not necessarily considered to be a rational and critically equipped adult, but may very well be constituted as either a 'vulnerable' child, or a 'deviant' sexual predator.

In the particular case of depictions of sexual or sexualised violence the 'media effects' canon can be seen to produce a very specific model of the 'pathological' spectator that has been taken up not only within official regulatory discourses, but also by both film critics and viewers. As such this 'figure of the audience', this 'imagined' spectator, exerts a significant influence over both the statutory regulation of contemporary film, as well as the more everyday instances of attempted normative social control over the reception of these films. Questions of a text's suitability therefore begin to circulate increasingly around this 'imagined' spectator and the problem of his (and it is emphatically his) potential arousal and/or enjoyment of images of sexual and sexualised violence, despite the fact that studies attempting to associate 'sexual deviancy' with increased arousal in response to viewing sexually violent acts have been shown to be significantly flawed.

Throughout this chapter discussion of British national policy has been set within a wider Anglo-American context. This has been done for three primary reasons. Firstly, the findings of predominantly US based 'media effects' research have exerted an enormous influence over the terms of public debate about film regulation within the UK, and as a result have become the foundation of recent UK policy and legislation. Secondly, the dominance of American film at the UK box office, not to mention the global marketplace, has meant that the American film industry has occupied, and continues to occupy, a position of enormous

cultural power. The American film industry has therefore not only defined dominant narrative, and perhaps even ideological, norms within UK cinema, but has had a privileged position in defining what counts as 'mainstream' and concomitantly, what kinds of themes and depictions will be pushed to the margins. But perhaps most importantly, I have been concerned to explore how members of the public may or may not mobilise their own 'figures of the audience' when discussing the genre of 'torture porn'. I therefore chose to explore web-based discussions and reviews surrounding the film *Wolf Creek.* And here too American cultural production tends to predominate, setting a significant context within which web-based discussions take place.

Web-based discussions were chosen for this study for a number of reasons, namely the ease with which the data could be stored and analysed and the ease of access to viewer's comments, both in terms of the resources required, as well as the sheer volume of information that was readily available. As both David Gauntlett[694] and Henry Jenkins have pointed out, the web offers "an incredibly rich resource for audience research."[695] Indeed, in terms of the wealth of user-generated material available, Jenkins suggests that one might compare this "embarrassment of riches with the forty-two letters that form the corpus of Ien Ang's" seminal work on the viewers of *Dallas*.[696] Moreover, individuals are choosing to spend more and more of their leisure time online,[697] and so the world wide web provides an increasingly significant context within which the reception of film is both shaped and communicated.

The focus of the research on the reception of films featuring sexual and/or sexualised violence was also a significant factor in the choice to access online discussions. As Martin Barker and his colleagues found in their research into the audiences of sexual violence, drawing conclusions about viewers' constructions of a 'pathological other' who may be aroused or titillated by such scenes was made more difficult by the fact that participants were being asked to reflect on the BBFC's position with regard to these issues.[698] In this respect, conducting unobtrusive research which made use of unsolicited material written by viewers allowed me to assess the extent to which these 'figures' were being

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[694] David Gauntlett, 'Researching movie audiences – the armchair method', in *Framework*, Vol.41, No.1, (Sept 1999), republished at http://www.newmediastudies.com/armchair.htm, (accessed 10th May 2010)
[695] Henry Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture,* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 117
[696] Jenkins, (2006), 117
[697] Ofcom, *Communications Market Report,* (London: Ofcom, 2010), http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/research/cmr/753567/CMR_2010_FINAL.pdf
[698] Barker et al, (2007), 165

constituted and mobilised within viewer's reviews and discussions without inadvertently provoking their formation through the research itself. Further, as Barker et al also noted, many participants within their study felt a high degree of ambivalence in admitting to being aroused when watching this kind of film.[699] Unobtrusive research was therefore seen to have the added advantage of being able to capitalise on the relative anonymity of the web in order to capture moments of candour that individuals may or may not have wanted to express face to face. As Nicolas Hookway suggests in relation to his own work on blogs, this anonymity

> enables bloggers to write more honestly and candidly, mitigating potential impression management...This…gives blogging a confessional quality, where a less polished and even uglier self can be verbalized. One can express one's faults, one's mishaps – whatever might be difficult to tell as we 'enter the presence of others'… in face-to-face relations.[700]

While my concern in this chapter has actually been to demonstrate that online review sites are performatively structured in relation to a range of cultural norms[701] about how one ought and ought not to respond to scenes of sexual violence, it was nevertheless felt that the ease with which users could create a profile and post to mainstream, commercial sites like IMDb allowed some individuals to respond in ways they may not have if their identity were known. For example, one user who reported feeling "ashamed and horrified" for having watched the film *Chaos* appeared to have created the account for the sole purpose of 'confessing' his/her horror, as no other activity is recorded for this user.[702]

But whilst the choice to draw on reviews and comments posted on mainstream, commercial websites was taken in order to explore how 'figures of the audience' were being constructed and used by mainstream viewers, as opposed to how they might be constituted within specific fan-based subcultures, making use of this data was not without its problems. In the first instance, the very limited amount of demographic information about age, gender and nationality, meant that certain forms of analysis were closed off, or would have relied on stereotyping on the part of the researcher. For example the sheer volume of information about the use of coping strategies to 'get through' films of this kind, such as hiding behind cushions or watching only during daylight hours,

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[699] Barker et al, (2007), 191
[700] Nicolas Hookway, '"Entering the blogosphere": some strategies for using blogs in social research', in *Qualitative Research,* Vol.8, No. 1 (2008), 96
[701] See Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures,* (London: Routledge, 2002)
[702] http://www.imdb.com/user/ur12548389/boards/profile, (accessed 10th May 2011)

coupled with some limited self-disclosed personal information seemed to suggest a distinctly gendered dimension to the process of viewing. But without consistent data, it was difficult to draw any solid conclusions.

More troublesome was the issue of nationality. It was my intention to show how a 'pathological subject' was constructed within both official regulatory discourses and the more popular discourses of professional film reviews and user-generated discussions. At the outset of the study I identified the IMDb as a key resource, partly because of the wealth of information to be found there, and partly because of the site's widespread reputation and use amongst filmgoers in the UK. The IMDb was therefore seen as a key context in which reception was produced and discussed. However, the predominantly American character of user reviews on the site may well have influenced my findings. However, it should be noted that of the twenty nine viewer comments that have been directly quoted in this chapter, eighteen were strongly suspected to be British, either by virtue of identifying themselves as such or by posting their comments on a specifically British commercial site, although in one instance, an IMDb user was assumed to be British because of his/her use of British language/spelling. Of the remaining, all from IMDb, seven either identified as, or were strongly suspected to be American, leaving one Canadian contributor, and three who simply did not provide enough information. Although there were profound differences in terms of individual responses to the film, the concerns expressed about the potentially deviant 'other', or the experience of guilt and shame did not seem to differ between the IMDb and specifically British sites.

Similarly, among the twelve professional reviews and cultural commentaries used here, six were from the US and six were from the UK, and broadly speaking the concerns they expressed, whether about the treatment of women and its potential effect on the audience, or about the other critics' vitriolic responses, did not seem to differ. Indeed, both American and British audiences have been found to share in a common discursive base for these discussions, and to express shared cultural anxieties within this international forum. Nevertheless, while I have tried to present the regulation of film in the UK within an Anglo-American context simply because of the enormous influence the USA has had on the terms of UK debate over depictions of sexual violence, the decision to treat web-based reception practices as one that transcends national borders may well have led to a glossing of the nuances of the specifically national character of viewer's readings and interpretations.

It is also important to note the specificity of web-based reception practices and the people who engage in them. Clearly in drawing on unsolicited comments on web-based film review sites, data has been limited to those who are both willing and able to share their thoughts and opinions in this way. Although there is little in the way of demographic information for the particular users of the sites under discussion, on the strength of studies about web use more generally, it is unlikely that this self-selected group of users are representative of the population at large. The decision to create a profile and share one's thoughts on a high-profile public forum like the IMDb may also skew the sample, and so one must be careful not to over generalise on the strength of these reviews.

Moreover, as I have already suggested these online spaces are performatively structured according to the prevailing community norms. As such, while individuals may produce themselves, and 'others', as particular kinds of viewing subjects, we must be careful about making assumptions about how this might translate into other contexts. For example, reports of guilt and shame may tell us much about how an individual chooses to reflect on the experience of viewing within the very particular context of the user review section of IMDb or EasyCinema.com, but it tells us little about the actual moment in which a film is consumed and experienced, and nor does it discount the possibility that the same individual may present themselves and their responses in a very different way within another online forum. This may be particularly true of horror film fans.

The mainstream, commercial sites chosen for this study, I would suggest, attract a large and diffuse 'majority' audience. As such, I would argue that it is this group who set the terms of the discussion, and by extension it is their conception of the 'pathological other' that holds sway within these spaces. While Barker et al's study demonstrated that fans of particular films might also mobilise certain models of the 'other' in the course of their discussions, their study also demonstrated these groups' awareness that in many instances they are constructed as the 'problem' for mainstream audiences. A fan's self-presentation within mainstream websites like the IMDb may be quite different to how he or she might choose to present his or her self within a closed forum specifically aimed at a 'connoisseur' or 'cult' audience. In this respect, it remains to be seen whether those people who self-categorised as 'sick' or 'twisted' within this mainstream forum would continue to present themselves in this way in other contexts. And similarly, further research needs to be done to discover whether

the experience of guilt and shame continues within other, more specialised contexts.

In spite of these limitations, what I hope to have demonstrated is that the legacy of US based 'media effects' research has led to a climate in which the 'imagined' spectator has not only become a central term around which issues of UK legislation and film regulation circulate, but that within a wider Anglo-American debate over controversial film, the regulation of cinema is undergoing a significant process of subjectification. That is, within both public and institutional debate about the regulation of film, the figure of the deviant or vulnerable spectator becomes the locus around which questions of 'appropriate' depictions of sexual or sexualised violence revolve. The 'problem' of cinema has thereby been focused on one or two specific 'subject positions'' constructed within the 'media effects' research. As we have seen within UK regulation, the BBFC are required by law to take account of these 'vulnerable' and 'deviant' subjects in the process of making their classificatory and censorship decisions, even for films aimed at an adult audience.

Within the wider Anglo-American public debate about the film *Wolf Creek,* although the film represented a significant cause for concern for a number of viewers, in neither the US nor the UK did these commentators call for the film to be cut or banned by an institutional authority. Instead, efforts were directed towards the 'problematisation', 'stigmatisation', or even 'pathologisation' of those who may 'enjoy', 'embrace' or simply want to see the film. This problematisation of the viewer extends from simple name calling, through to suggestions that those who choose to watch a film like this are in need of 'introspection', and at the furthest extreme, professional help for their 'sick minds'. Moreover, this process of differentiation between the 'normal' and the 'deviant' continues within mainstream Anglo-American web-based discussion, where it is used to categorise both audience behaviours and individual affective responses in face of the film. Although there are clear struggles over how one ought to feel when watching a film like *Wolf Creek,* concern clearly circulates around whether potential viewers will respond 'appropriately' to the events that they witness on-screen. From concerns that the viewer will not engage seriously with the film and will instead laugh at the perpetration of violence, through to the considerable fear that certain 'sick-minded men' will engage erotically with the film.

This differentiation between the 'normal' and the 'deviant' viewer, as well as between 'normal' and 'deviant' behaviours and affective responses in face of

the film, however, does not simply describe an objective set of criteria. Rather this process of differentiation both within 'media effects' research and in popular debate is prescriptive insofar as it defines a normative standard that constitutes 'appropriate' forms of spectatorship. As such, reception of any individual film featuring graphic scenes of sexual violence takes place within a cultural climate that implores that the viewer not only behaves appropriately within the cinema, but as we have seen, there is significant evidence to suggest that viewers are also incited to internalise these debates and interrogate their own engagements and responses in relation to these normative standards. Of course any individual viewer is free to refuse to take up this discursively produced subject position in relation to the film. As I have already suggested, there is significant evidence to suggest that particular fan communities may well understand themselves and their relations to such films in very different terms to those circulated within the commercial mainstream, and so watching such a film within this context may well produce very different readings and responses.

Nevertheless, these discourses taken together construct a highly normative definition of appropriate textual relations and responses, which appear to be internalised by at least some members of the audience. As such, these discourses taken together can be seen to mobilises the language of pathology in an attempt to exert a degree of informal social control over the consumption of cinema in the contemporary age. The process of subjectification, understood broadly as both the constitution and mobilisation of a pathological subject within discourse, and the incitement for individuals to produce themselves as 'normal' and/or 'appropriate' viewers, can therefore be seen to supplement the regulatory practices of bodies like the BBFC. And as such, this process of subjectification represents a form of governmentality that seeks to persuade the viewer to regulate their own viewing practices, by either eschewing certain cultural forms, or by managing their own subjective responses to such films.

Horrific Subjects:

The Morality of Looking in Michael Haneke's
Funny Games and Gaspar Noé's *Irréversible*

"When you show violence on screen it may be taken as cool, appealing, as something worth imitating. I always run the risk of being misinterpreted but I am not going to help viewers in their violent fantasies."

- Michael Haneke[703]

"If I had shaken the camera around…I would have been in the rapist's head. Also, I would have felt like getting horny, which I didn't want. I'm part of the male club, I know what we are."

- Gaspar Noé[704]

At first glance, Michael Haneke's *Funny Games* and Gaspar Noé's *Irréversible* seem diametrically opposed. On the one hand Haneke's *Funny Games* presents a self-reflexive polemic against what Haneke sees as morally

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[703] Stuart Jeffries, 'Torture for the Audience', *The Sydney Morning Herald,* 30th August 2008, http://www.smh.com.au/news/film/torture-for-the-audience/2008/08/29/1219516723155.html, (accessed 5th July 2010)
[704] Fiona Morrow, 'Gaspar Noé: I'm not the Anti-christ', *The Independent,* 17th Jan 2003, http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/features/gaspar-noeacute-im-not-the-antichrist-601899.html, (accessed 5th July 2010)

bereft depictions of graphic violence within mainstream cinema and the unthinking spectators who take pleasure in consuming it. While on the other hand Noé secured his status as the *enfant terrible* of French cinema with his explicit and brutal depiction of rape and violence in *Irréversible.* But though these two directors take vastly different stances on whether one ought to be looking at explicit representations of violence, as the quotes above suggest, what they share is a somewhat pessimistic view of the spectator and their relationship to the spectacle of brutality. As a result, and as I will seek to show in this chapter, both Haneke and Noé adopt similar devices to disrupt and problematise the 'pleasures' of viewing violence. And while both these films can be seen to mobilise the cultural fears exemplified in the figure of the 'passive' spectator of apparatus theory and the potentially 'deviant' spectator of the 'media effects' debates, what separates these two films are the directors' strategies for overcoming these perceived spectatorial predispositions.

What I want to suggest in this chapter then, is that both of these films have been produced within the context of debates about the effects of viewing media violence. And in common with the preceding chapters of this thesis, I will seek to argue that both *Funny Games* and *Irréversible,* each in their different way, should be seen as both a refusal of institutional censorship as a means of regulating cinema and a vision of how the spectator might be appropriately 'disciplined' in order to take up an appropriate relation with on-screen violence.

Both filmmakers are of course, on record as being fundamentally opposed to statutory censorship. Gaspar Noé in particular appears to regularly defy the BBFC to intervene in his brutally violent and shocking films. In 2002 Noé declared that he would rather withdraw *Irréversible,* a gut-wrenching depiction of rape and revenge, from circulation in the UK than allow the BBFC to cut the film.[705] More tellingly, speaking to one British journalist about his film *Seul Contre Tous,*[706] Noé suggested that he "would have liked to have had it banned, since it would have shown that he 'had made something shocking'".[707] Similarly, while *Funny Games* represents an unequivocal denunciation of screen violence, and a concerted attack on the American film industry for its role in making violence "consumable",[708] Haneke does not see his film as a call for increased statutory or even industry regulation. As he puts it, "If you start

[705] '"Rape film" released uncut', *BBC News,* 21st October 2002. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/film/2346769.stm, (accessed 5th July 2010)
[706] *Seul contre tous*, directed by Gaspar Noé, (France: Rézo films, 1998)
[707] Liese Spencer, "Cinema to dishonour France", *The Independent,* 14th Jan 1999, 12
[708] Richard Falcon, 'The Discreet Harm of the Bourgeoisie', *Sight and Sound*, 8, no.5 (May 1998), 12

banning or cutting things…the market will just disappear under the counter. It won't go away." Instead, he aims "to make people a little more aware of their role as consumers".[709]

As such, *Funny Game*s, in its unequivocal and aggressive questioning of the spectator's relationship to the onscreen torture and violence can be seen to explicitly contribute to the increasing subjectification of film regulation, wherein it is the consumer of 'extreme' images who is increasingly monitored, policed and disciplined, rather than the 'extreme images' themselves. And despite being more elusive, and perhaps even contradictory in its construction of spectatorial relations, Noé's film, no less than Haneke's is concerned with both the possibility of 'deviant' responses, and the constitution of 'appropriate' relations with the screen. In this respect, I will seek to demonstrate that what began in the disciplinary practices of the 'media effects' tradition, in their identification of certain categories of 'pathological' viewers and responses, has not only worked its way into the contemporary regulatory framework, and the wider popular discourses of cinema, but also into reflexive representations of film violence themselves. Here the matter of regulation is less an issue of the censorship or control of the availability of images, and more a question of what the individual spectator ought to choose to view, as well as how s/he ought to respond to images of violence.

Pathologising the Spectator in Funny Games

There is no denying that Michael Haneke's *Funny Games* is a tough film to watch. Originally released in 1997, this brutal German language film presents the disturbing tale of a family taken hostage in their holiday home by two sociopathic young men, who proceed to torture them, both physically and psychologically, before killing them, unceremoniously, one by one. Throughout the film the camera focuses relentlessly on the family's pain and suffering, giving "back to violence", as Haneke puts it, "that which it is: pain, a violation of

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[709] Falcon, (1998), 12

others."[710] As such, the film persistently underlines the horrific nature of the violence depicted, as well as launching a vehement attack on the screen violence that pervades contemporary film. *Funny Games* was variously described by Haneke as a "'counterprogram' to Stone's *Natural Born Killers*[711]"[712] and an "anti-Tarantino film".[713] Similarly, his shot for shot, English language remake of the film, is presented as a reaction to "all that torture-porn shit that is so prevalent in American cinema and American life."[714] But while Haneke, is outspoken in his views of the American film industry for its role in making violence "consumable",[715] the target of his critique within *Funny Games* is not the film industry per se, but the audience, whose narrative desires and willingness to consume such depictions underpin the presentation of graphic violence on our screens. *Funny Games* therefore, refrains from a misguided pastiche of contemporary media and instead chooses to address the spectator directly, consistently challenging and chastising the audience for their voyeuristic complicity in scenes of degradation and torture.

Beginning around twenty minutes into the film Haneke 'breaks the fourth wall' by having one of the murderous protagonists turn to the camera and wink directly at the spectator in the midst of a ghoulish game in which Anna Schober is sent to find the family dog, apparently beaten to death with a golf club. Indeed there are a number of moments in which this same protagonist, most commonly referred to as Paul during the film, turns to the camera in order to question and/or accuse the viewer for their investment in scenes of torture and violence. As such *Funny Games* can be seen to employ this direct address in order to question the spectator about the nature of their relations to the family's suffering, as well as their expectations and investments in scenes of violence. For example, when Paul announces their intention to kill the family by the morning, he asks the spectator directly "Do you think they have a chance of winning? You are on their side aren't you?". And when Georg begs for the family's ordeal to stop, Paul asks the spectator "Is that enough? But you want a real ending,

[710] Tanja Laine, '"What are you looking at and why?": Michael Haneke's *Funny Games* (1997) with his audience', *Kinoeye: New Perspectives on European Film* 4, no. 1, (8th March 2004), http://www.kinoeye.org/04/01/laine01.php, (accessed 23rd April 2009)
[711] *Natural Born Killers,* directed by Oliver Stone, (USA: Warner Brothers Pictures, 1994)
[712] Christopher Sharrett, 'The World that is Known: Michael Haneke Interviewed', *Kinoeye: New Perspectives on European Film* 4, no. 1 (8th Mar 2004), http://www.kinoeye.org/04/01/interview01.php, (accessed 23rd April 2009)
[713] Jonathan Romney, 'If you can survive this film without walking out, you must be seriously disturbed', *The Guardian,* 23rd Oct 1998, quoted in Catherine Wheatley, *Michael Haneke's Cinema,* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2009), 98
[714] Jeffries, (2008)
[715] Falcon, (1998), 11

with plausible plot development, don't you?". Similarly, the two young men justify their continuing persecution of the family on the grounds: "Don't forget the entertainment value!". If they were to stop, "We'd all be deprived of our pleasure", since "We're not up to feature film length yet." And during one 'funny game', that Paul calls 'The Loving Wife', he takes the gag from Anna's mouth whilst telling her "The dumb suffer in unspectacular fashion. We want to offer the audience something and show them what we can do, right?"

On the one hand then, these self-reflexive moments within the film, place responsibility for the continuing sadism and suffering of the family squarely on the shoulders of the film industry, and the demands of contemporary filmic conventions of 'spectacle', 'plausible plot development' and the need to fill the traditional 90min format. In its use of the direct address and self-reflexive asides *Funny Games* can be seen to subvert, what in Haneke's view is, a willfully sadistic and deeply manipulative form of filmmaking. Moreover, as Catherine Wheatley puts it, they shatter the illusion of the spectator's unmediated access to the fictional world.[716] Narrative motivation, trajectory and resolution are all exposed in *Funny Games* as the arbitrary, and essentially meaningless and unnecessary grounds for the presentation of violence and suffering, for the pleasure of the viewing public.

This desire to expose the codes and conventions that underpin the thriller genre as a whole, and 'torture-porn' specifically, reaches its apogee towards the end of the film when Anna grabs a gun and shoots her tormentor, Peter. Paul however, responds by searching for the remote control and rewinding the scene, reflexively revealing the spurious nature of the film's own narrative logic, and the senseless, unnecessary nature of the violence being depicted, a point underlined by Paul's mocking fabrications when asked why he and Peter are doing this. In *Funny Games* there is no motive and no logic over and above the relentless visitation of pain and suffering, and there will be no pleasure in the violent revenge and ultimate triumph of the victim, or the escape of the 'final girl', indeed, at the end of the film, Anna will be unceremoniously dumped in a lake to drown, without a struggle.

The scene is obviously notable because it subsumes the narrative to the extra-textual representation of the media apparatus. Less obvious though, is that this scene represents the only graphic depiction of violence within the film. It is clearly designed to provide the viewer with a brief moment of hope for the

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716 Wheatley, (2009), 98

family, and a pleasurable catharsis in seeing an end to both the family's and one's own suffering. As Haneke might put it, "I make the audience fall into all kinds of traps, and then I show them that they've fallen into these traps."[717] The trap in this case being the desire to see this act of violence carried out, for their pleasure. However, in thwarting Anna's revenge, Haneke deliberately draws the spectator's attention to their own complicity with and desire for this spectacle of violence within the film. The film questions the spectator's relation to the spectacle of suffering by asking the spectator directly whether 'You are on their side aren't you?', but in the end it concludes that it is the desire to consume such images that is pathological, irrespective of who we choose to identify with. In this and other scenes the film deliberately highlights the spectator's investment in the violence visited on an innocent family, they have paid their money to see a family tortured and killed and the director is grimly determined to fulfil that promise for the full length of a feature film.

Haneke himself characterises his films as "polemical statements against the American 'taking-one-by-surprise-before-one-can-think' cinema",[718] or more accurately, a reaction against "the disempowerment of the spectator"[719] that such cinema entails. As he puts it, "with Hollywood films, the manipulation of the viewer is so total that they don't know they're being manipulated."[720] Haneke undoubtedly wants "the spectator to think", and his intention within his films is "to rape" them "into autonomy and into independence."[721] Portrayals of violence are therefore shown to be the responsibility of both the Hollywood machine, and a product of consumer demand. And what makes the film all the more torturous for the audience is precisely Haneke's use of a direct, confrontational address, that interrogates the spectator about his/her desires and pleasures in face of such a film. As Catherine Wheatley suggests, Haneke's intention is to expose the codes and conventions of Hollywood cinema "as devices for manipulation", at the same time as he confronts "spectators with their own participation in the scopic act".[722]

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[717] S.F. Said, 'Are we waving or drowning?', *The Telegraph,* 17th May 2001, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/4723565/Are-we-waving-or-drowning.html, (accessed 6th July 2010)
[718] Said, (2001)
[719] Said, (2001)
[720] Jeffries, (2008)
[721] Fiona Morrow, 'Michael Haneke: All Pain and No Gain', *The Independent,* 2nd Nov 2001, http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/features/michael-haneke-all-pain--and-no-gain-615601.html, (accessed 5th July 2010)
[722] Wheatley, (2009), 87

More particularly Wheatley argues, that Haneke deliberately constructs an 'unpleasureable experience' for the spectator, which is

> redoubled as the spectator comes to the realisation that their initial unpleasure was the result of the frustration of certain desires – desires which, in fact, may be the reverse of admirable. The spectator thus may enter into an experience of the unpleasureable emotions of guilt or shame, as they realise that they are watching something (or want to watch something) that they ought not to be watching (or wanting to watch).[723]

During the scene in which the family's young son Schorschi is shot dead for example, the camera refuses to witness the violence, focusing instead the dispassionate image of Paul making a sandwich in the kitchen, whilst we hear the violence play out in another room. This scene then, illustrates what Tarja Laine describes as the central paradox of the film in which "the viewer occupies the same emotional level as the Schobers, while at the meta-narrative level s/he is invited to share the point of view of the psychopathic killers"; a paradoxical relation that is not only disturbing to watch but that "forces us to acknowledge our own position with respect to violence in the media."[724] As Christopher Sharrett suggests, it is a key moment in which "we are forced into an awareness of our own impatience at not being able to see what we ought to wish won't happen".[725] And by extension we, the spectators, are forced to interrogate our own pathological desire to watch the brutalisation and murder of an innocent young boy.

Of course Sharrett's analysis relies on the universalistic assumption that the viewer does actually feel impatient to watch the scene of death, during this scene, rather than relieved that s/he is being spared the ordeal. But nevertheless, it is clear that Haneke is refuting the conventions of Hollywood action cinema precisely in his refusal to focus on the (violent) narrative action. But Haneke also makes a moral choice not to "use a fascist aesthetic to achieve an anti-fascist goal", and run the risk of making "the violent image alluring".[726] Indeed as the opening quote of this chapter suggested, in Haneke's view "when you show violence on screen it may be taken as cool, appealing, as something

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[723] Wheatley, (2009), 154
[724] Laine, (2004)
[725] Christopher Sharrett, 'Michael Haneke and the Discontents of European Culture', *Framework* 47, no.2, (Fall 2006), 19
[726] Sharrett, (2004)

worth imitating."[727] And he fundamentally refuses "to help viewers in their violent fantasies." [728]

When we do return to the scene of Schorschi's murder, we are presented with a protracted shot of a blood splattered television as the killers prepare to leave, the literal depiction of the impact of violence on the screen. The camera then cuts to a ten minute take of the parents' wordless grief seen in long shot. Anna struggles to her feet to switch off the steady meaningless drone of motor racing, and slowly their shocked silence turns to ravaged howls for their lost son. If any scene in the film exemplifies Haneke's desire to give back the pain of violence it is this one.

The blood soaked screen of the television quite obviously symbolises the central place Haneke accords TV in the dissemination of violent imagery. But he is also concerned about its impact on the social fabric, particularly in its contribution to widespread alienation and "our collective loss of reality and social disorientation",[729] as we succumb to the everyday simulation of reality presented in the media. As Haneke puts it, "Our experiential horizon is very limited. What we know of the world is little more than the mediated world, the image. We have no reality, but a derivative of reality, which is extremely dangerous". [730] His fear about the particular impact of screen violence on the social world is hinted at in the final scene of the film, where Peter and Paul briefly discuss the difference between fiction and reality: "But the fiction is real…You see it in the film...So it's as real as the reality you see."

In this context, the glamourisation of violence, or the failure to show the consequences of violent action within fiction begins to seem very ominous indeed. Fiction, for Haneke, is not bracketed off by the viewer as 'unreal' but is absorbed as a prosthetic memory: "implanted memories",[731] "the experience of which we have never lived"[732] but nevertheless threaten to disrupt our "subjective autonomy",[733] as they "become experiences that film consumers both possess and feel possessed by."[734] As Landsberg suggests, this concern with "the experiential nature of the spectator's engagement with the image",[735] has a

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[727] Jeffries, (2008)
[728] Jeffries, (2008)
[729] Sharrett, (2004)
[730] Sharrett, (2004)
[731] Landsberg, (2000), 190
[732] Landsberg, (2000), 191
[733] Landsberg, (200) 190
[734] Landsberg, (2000), 191
[735] Landsberg, (2000), 193

long history of being associated with a concern over 'media effects', and the particular capacity of media to act as a site of social conditioning.

However, Landsberg argues, that the Baudrillardian assertion that contemporary media has brought about a fundamental collapse between the real and the simulacrum, between the real and the hyperreal, and the consequent disappearance of any authentically real experience, rests on the weary assumption that there ever was an 'authentic', 'unmediated' reality to begin with. Rather she asserts, "the real has always been mediated through information cultures and through narrative."[736] More relevant to our discussion here though, is to point out Haneke's explicit and implicit construction of the spectator as passive, uncritical, intensely vulnerable to suggestion, and potentially dangerous, insofar as they might adopt the callousness of fictional violence as their own, and/or be persuaded to both enjoy and enact their violent fantasies. Haneke's aim within *Funny Games* then, is not only to attempt to force the spectator out of an unthinking passivity and confront his/her own (reprehensible) desire for violence, but as Catherine Wheatley suggests, it invites "the spectator to engage morally with the film."[737]

Haneke's use of the long take, for example, is a reaction against the intensely mediated experience of television. It is a refusal to manipulate the viewer through montage. Instead offering up "time to understand what one sees…Not just understand on an intellectual level, but emotionally",[738] and in the process to "shift responsibility back to the viewer"[739] to contemplate what they are seeing on the screen. As Rhodes puts it, the long take forces "spectators to assume a more active role in interpreting the representation of reality before them. No longer are spectators guided by the close up, the edit, the montage sequence; instead they are [in Andre Bazin's terms] '*forced* to discern'".[740] Moreover, as Wheatley suggests, *Funny Games* is a film which deliberately attempts to provoke the experience of guilt and shame, prompting the spectator into a "moral thought space"[741] as they seek out the source of their complicity with the cinematic medium.

Indeed Wheatley asserts that:

> Mainstream cinema usually frees us of this sense of guilt by
> providing us with the rational oblivion that undermines any

[736] Landsberg, (2000), 192
[737] Wheatley, (2009), 79
[738] Sharrett, (2004)
[739] Sharrett, (2004)
[740] John David Rhodes, 'Haneke, the Long Take, Realism', in *Framework* 47, no.2, (Fall 2006), 18
[741] Wheatley, (2009), 154

ability to feel guilt. Haneke's films, however, restore us to this state of guilt, bringing us back to an awareness of our moral values, and so forcing us to engage morally with the film in the same way that we engage with society. The director and his film thus act as a force of social conscience for the cinematic spectacle.[742]

However, I refute the implication that our sense of guilt and shame 'naturally' pre-exist the act of viewing, disavowed in our encounter with the Hollywood apparatus and simply restored to us within Haneke's cinema, the question of whether a fiction film should be dealt with "in the same way that we engage with society" notwithstanding. Such a view obscures the power relations between the filmmaker and the spectator, in his assumptions about what the spectator's narrative desires actually are, and in his construction of how viewers 'ought' to engage with both images of violence and with society more generally. Indeed Wheatley herself admits that "Haneke…might seek to preclude the 'wrong' responses" to his film, although she contends that this "does not equate to a desire to instil the 'right' response…the goal is moral reflection in and of itself".[743] Either way, Haneke can clearly be seen to delimit and define 'appropriate' viewing relations with his film, and by extension, to images of screen violence more generally.

There is no doubt that *Funny Games* was intended by Haneke as "a slap in the face and a provocation"[744] that attempts to force the audience to take personal responsibility for the consumption of graphic portrayals of violence and to question their own motives for doing so. And as such, *Funny Games* can therefore be seen not only to assume that the spectator's relations to screen violence are pathological, but it also deliberately inserts itself into contemporary media effects debates as a disciplinary practice that seeks to educate and reform the spectator into more 'appropriate' relations with the screen. Haneke's critical intervention in the issue of screen violence therefore, is not a question of censorship. Rather, in directly confronting its viewers and forcing them to question their relationship to the horrific events being depicted within the film, as well as raising viewers' awareness of their role in perpetuating the production of 'extreme' violence more generally, *Funny Games* is a film that actively attempts to bring about the 'subjectification' of film regulation.

That is, *Funny Games,* represents a key cinematic text in which the 'problem' of screen violence is solved not through the banning of the film or the

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[742] Wheatley, (2009), 174-175
[743] Wheatley, (2009), 105
[744] Sharrett, (2004)

cutting of scenes that transgress our cultural boundaries of what is acceptable, but by transforming the problem of the regulation of screen violence into a *technology of the self.*[745] Indeed as S.F. Said put it in *The Telegraph, Funny Games* is a film that "works on more than one level. There is the story, but then there is the level of our own reactions, of which we become increasingly aware. This is a director who wants not just to entertain you, but to expand your self-knowledge."[746] To put it another way, Haneke's film proposes that if we wish to stem the flow of the production of 'extreme' violence within film, the answer is not the regulation and control of images and/or texts, rather it is a matter of exerting power over the individual spectator and persuading him or her to regulate their viewing habits on ethical grounds. Indeed as Wheatley herself suggests the question of morality within the film, is not so much a question of whether such portrayals of violence ought to be produced and circulated, but rather, "In *Funny Games* the moral problem centres on the spectator's realisation of themselves as a scopophilic subject."[747]

However, "as Foucault has pointed out, there is no way of living as an ethical subject except through certain modes of subjectification, involving monitoring, testing and improving of the self".[748] *Funny Games* is a film that proposes not only a set of moral codes which, to paraphrase Nikolas Rose, is identifiable in the language it uses, the ethical territory it maps out, the attributes of the person that it identifies as being of ethical significance, the ways of evaluating them it proposes, the pitfalls to avoid and the goals to pursue,[749] but it also provides a set of 'techniques of the self'. That is, "models proposed for setting up and developing relationships with the self, for self-reflection, self-knowledge, self-examination, for the deciphering of the self by oneself, for the transformation one seeks to accomplish with oneself as object."[750] As such, *Funny Games* represents more than a simple polemic against screen violence, it is more properly to be considered part of a wider cultural discourse over how violent films ought to be governed in the absence of state intervention. A discourse in which the question of regulation is a question of what the individual spectator *ought to choose to view*, as well as how he or she *ought to respond* to 'extreme' imagery. To borrow from Nikolas Rose once more, in face of

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[745] Michel Foucault, 'Technologies of the self' in *Technologies of the self*, ed. Luther H Martin, Huck Gutman and Patrick H. Hutton, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988)
[746] Said, (2001)
[747] Wheatley, (2009), 106
[748] Rose, (1989), 245
[749] Rose, (1989), 245
[750] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Volume 2: The Use of Pleasure*, (London: Viking, 1986), 29 quoted in Rose, (1989), 245

increasing liberalisation Michael Haneke's *Funny Games* can fruitfully be seen to engage with the pervasive cultural problem of "how free individuals can be governed such that they enact their freedom appropriately."[751]

The morality of looking

Within *Funny Games* Haneke not only attempts to problematise the pleasure the spectator derives from watching screen violence, but actively attempts to bring about a situation which Sobchack argues is common in our cultural attitude towards non-fictional representations of unsimulated death, where "the very act of looking at the film is ethically charged, and this act is itself an object of ethical judgement."[752] Haneke, therefore not only refuses to show scenes of violence on ethical grounds, but in the one instance where violence is directly represented on-screen, Haneke forces the spectator into a position of ethical responsibility for both the act of viewing, and the narrative desire that underpinned its appearance.

Sobchack argues that within our culture, although fiction film must meet some minimum ethical requirements in order to for its visions of death to be deemed acceptable, this kind of ethical problematisation refers only to the non-fiction film. Indeed, in her view "fiction films inspect death in detail, with the casual observation of realism, with undisguised prurient interest, or with formal reverence…Indeed…death in our fiction films has become a commonplace – rather than taboo – visual event."[753] Moreover, "the emotions we feel", "the values we risk" and the "ethical significance" we attach to the act of looking, differs "in kind as well as degree from the way we respond to death in the documentary."[754] While Sobchack is undoubtedly correct about the generic, not to mention social and historical, specificity of the ethics of looking, what Sobchack reminds us of is that cinema and film are already bound up in moral discourse. And acts of looking, both by the filmmaker and by the spectator are

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[751] Rose, (1998), 29
[752] Sobchack, (2004), 244
[753] Sobchack, (2004), 245
[754] Sobchack, (2004), 245

already subject to moral scrutiny. Haneke's intervention then is less an attempt to subject spectatorial relations to ethical examination, but an effort to extend and intensify pre-existing structures of ethical problematisation to representations of screen violence. That is not to say that these representations are not already subject to moral discourse, but rather, in Haneke's view the current system of ethical regulation is clearly insufficient.

Indeed, the moral problem presented by representations of violence, or more particularly sexual violence, can be clearly demonstrated with Gaspar Noé's *Irréversible*. In a tale, told backwards, about the brutal rape and beating of a young woman after a party, and the misdirected revenge taken by her current lover and her ex-boyfriend, Noé, unlike Haneke, chooses to present extremely graphic and brutal representations of violence and rape. Subsequent discussions about the film in the press frequently revolved around the issue of its morality. Stuart Jeffries of *The Guardian* for example, explicitly asked the central protagonist of *Irréversible*, Vincent Cassel, "what is the moral justification for such a film?"[755] While Gaspar Noé himself was challenged at the Edinburgh Film Festival, and is reported to have replied: "Rape happens in life. Why can't it be shown on screen so people can have a clearer vision of it? On a moral level, you can't object."[756] In both these cases those responsible for the production of the film are being made to account for the morality of their decision to represent such extreme violence on-screen. And for Noé at least, the decision to show such an extreme act of violence is justified on the basis of its relation to real acts of violence that occur every day.

Similarly, the question of the morality of such a portrayal is at the heart of David Edelstein's review, where he suggests that:

> It could be argued that this is the only moral way to present violence, so that it *hurts*…But there is nothing moral about *Irréversible*—only sneeringly superior and nihilistic…Noé's camera leers at Bellucci…He's on the verge of implying that such quivering ripeness can't be left unmolested…that by natural law it *ought* to be defiled.[757]

Noé then is clearly being held morally accountable for his 'act of looking', but perhaps more importantly, the spectator's 'act of looking', particularly at scenes

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[755] Stuart Jeffries, 'It shows us the animal inside us', *The Guardian,* 31st January 2003, http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2003/jan/31/2003inreview.features, (accessed 6th Jul 2010)
[756] Angelique Chrisafis, 'Why should we be regularly exposed to scenes of murder, but spared rape?', *The Guardian,* 23rd October 2002, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2002/oct/23/gender.uk, (accessed 6th Jul 2010)
[757] David Edelstein, '*Irréversible* Errors: Gaspar Noé's Cinematic Rape', *Slate,* 7th Mar 2003, http://www.slate.com/id/2079782, (accessed 6th Jul 2010)

of rape, is also presented as problematic. As we saw in the last chapter, suspicion surrounds those who are perceived to enjoy such imagery, with Angelique Chrisafis explicitly asking "why would any woman – or man – like a film like this?"[758] While Jessica Winter commenting that she observed a number of people leave the cinema "after – not during – the already infamous desecration of Alex…having gotten what they paid for",[759] and likening their "furtive attraction" to this scene of violence as being like that of an adolescent with a half-formed conscience and incomplete sense of shame.[760]

However it is not just the look of the 'other' that is problematised within the press as Edelstein's review makes abundantly clear:

> It's difficult to know what to do during those nine minutes in which Bellucci lies prone, moaning and weeping, while Prestia convincingly simulates a violent buggering. You can stare at her cleavage or at her long, extended leg. You can close your eyes and wait for the sounds to end. You can leave—although Noé would probably consider that a victory; he'd call you a bourgeois 'pussy.'[761]

Edelstein therefore exemplifies those who hold themselves "ethically responsible for his or her visible visual response"[762] to graphic images of rape, struggling to find an appropriate way to respond to the images presented to him. And similarly, Leslie Felperin suggests that:

> To not walk out is at the very least to collude with it…To watch it is to participate in its economy of pleasure and pain, to submit. You can't even question whether the rape scene 'needs' to be shown - it's the whole point of the movie...And therein lies *Irréversible's* irresistible power…It forces us to assess our relationship to the on-screen action, and our status as viewers, through an unsettling display of violence, [and] voyeurism[763]

Interestingly, both Felperin and Edelstein both comment on Noé's allusions to Kubrick, and suggest that calling the rape victim Alex, serves to remind us of the protagonist of *A Clockwork Orange*,[764] whose eyes were prised open as he was forced to watch all manner of atrocities in order to cure him of his desire for 'ultraviolence'. And indeed, a reading of both the murder at the beginning of the

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[758] Chrisafis, (2002)
[759] Jessica Winter, 'Noé Exit', *City Pages,* 16th April 2003, http://www.citypages.com/2003-04-16/movies/no-eacute-exit/, (accessed 6th Jul 2010)
[760] Winter, (2003)
[761] Edelstein, (2003)
[762] Sobchack, (2004), 245
[763] Leslie Felperin, 'Irreversible', *Sight and Sound*, 13, no.3, (Mar 2003), 48
[764] *A Clockwork Orange*, directed by Stanley Kubrick, (UK/USA: Warner Brothers Pictures, 1971)

film, and the rape halfway through can easily be read, through their graphic and unrelenting manner of presentation, as a kind of aversion therapy.

On the surface then, Noé's approach to the representation of extreme violence may appear to be diametrically opposed to Haneke's, in so far as he refuses to look away from the gruesome acts that he portrays, preferring instead to present unrelenting scenes of violence that push the viewer to the edge of their tolerance. However, that is not to say that his film *Irréversible* condones or supports the glamourisation, or commercialisation of screen violence. Indeed what I want to suggest is that Noé's film, no less than Haneke's, is a 'provocation' and 'a slap in the face' that attempts to confront its audience and unsettle the complacent and unthinking consumption of graphic violence promoted by the Hollywood mainstream.   But where Haneke seeks to challenge the ubiquity of screen violence, posing the fundamental question of whether we, as viewers, *ought* to be consuming this kind of imagery as entertainment, *Irréversible* is a film that presenting depictions of violence in the form of a visual assault, as Felperin suggests, opening up a space for self-reflection, prompting the viewer to interrogate their own relations and responses to such imagery and to develop an ethical self-understanding of their consumption of such images.

Aversive relations

While the graphic portrayals of violence within *Irréversible* might easily be read as appealing to a macabre and prurient interest, when placed within the context of the film as a whole, it becomes clear that these scenes are designed to provoke maximum revulsion within the spectator. Indeed, like *Funny Games, Irréversible* employs a number of techniques to disrupt the pleasurable consumption of violence, and promote an 'appropriate' or 'ethical' relationship to the violent spectacle. The film begins for example with wildly spinning camera work, that is accompanied by a soundtrack that contains a 27-hertz tone, purportedly used to disperse riots[765] by inducing nausea[766] in the listener, as the

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[765] *Press Kit : Australia and New Zealand*, (Melbourne: Accent International, 2002)
[766] Matt Bailey, 'Gaspar Noé', *Senses of Cinema,* http://archive.sensesofcinema.com/contents/directors/03/noe.html, (accessed 24th April 2009)

spectator is lead through a half glimpsed vision of a subterranean S&M club, before we see a confrontation and a brief scuffle before one of the protagonist's arms is deliberately broken, and the perpetrator is punished by being beaten to death with a fire extinguisher. Within the scene, the camera work effectively disorients the spectator preventing any real connection to the images or events on-screen until the moment of graphic violence itself. The result I would argue is one of shock rather than excitement, titillation or pleasure, and the attempt to underscore this scene with a nausea-inducing sound effect, clearly signals the director's intention that this scene should be profoundly visceral and unpleasant.

This spectatorial position is reinforced by the narrative structure of the film, which presents a familiar rape/revenge plot backwards. The spectator has no connection with the characters whatsoever, and so any pleasure s/he might have gained in seeing justice served for the horrific and brutal attack on Alex is effectively thwarted. In confronting us with this image at the beginning of the film it denies the spectator both any knowledge of why this attack is being carried out and of any emotional connection to the characters within the scene. Indeed it is only after we witness the Alex's rape in the subway that the spectator is permitted any form of empathetic relationship with the protagonists of the film. The spectator in this scene is therefore effectively alienated from the events taking place, and further, even if we as spectators attempt to regain a small source of cathartic pleasure in seeing justice served by reconstructing the plot imaginatively, we discover that this revenge attack has been perpetrated on the wrong person, while the rapist stands casually by.

During the rape scene itself, Noé also attempts to create a highly visceral response in the viewer, particularly through his use of the long take. As Noé puts it, "if you see…other movies dealing with rape or crime or killing, it's like the information goes through the screen - 'this guy has been killed; this woman has been raped' - but you don't have the emotional sensation of having seen anything", and then "There are movies when rape is long and then it becomes as painful as it could be on the screen".[767] And this sense of deliberately making the encounter as painful for the spectator as possible is reinforced by the camerawork within the scene, where a totally static camera stands in stark contrast to the wild and disorienting movement that has marked the camera work up until this point. With the camera fixed to the floor, the spectator is instead invited to take up the victim's perspective, and focus, relentlessly, on her

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[767] Warren Curry, 'Time Destroys All Things: An Interview with Gaspar Noé and Monica Bellucci', http://www.cinemaspeak.com/Interviews/tde.html, (accessed 24th April 2009)

pain and suffering throughout the nine minute ordeal. In this respect Noé like Haneke, adopts the long, static take as a way of giving back the pain and suffering of violence.

Indeed, as Haneke himself suggests, the long take is a device that shifts responsibility back to the viewer.[768] It creates a space for the spectator's own critical reflection. And as Felperin argues, the spectator is 'forced to discern' what their own relationship and responses to the events being depicted actually are. In this sense, Noé may not use a direct address to question the viewer, as Haneke does, but by confronting the spectator with such an arduous and protracted scene of violence, he effectively opens up a space for critical self-reflection.

Moreover, this impetus for the spectator to question his or her relationship to the rape is reinforced by the appearance of a man in the early stages of the attack, who clearly witnesses what is happening, but rather than intervene, walks off. His inaction not only draws attention to the spectator's powerlessness to intervene and stop the rape from happening, but also prompts the spectator to assess their relations to the sexual violence on-screen. The unknown witness in the subway is disturbing for the spectator, partly because of his refusal to intervene and stop the rape from happening, thereby saving both Alex and the spectator from the ordeal. But perhaps too, this man can be seen as the literal representation of Sartre's 'footsteps in the hallway', who catches the spectator in the act of looking, provoking a sense of shame for their voyeuristic complicity before the rape itself has even begun.

For Catherine Wheatley, the failure of *Irréversible* is precisely in the spectator's experience of powerlessness within the scene. So where she sees Haneke as promoting the spectator's active engagement with the text, Noé's film simply "positions the spectator as feminized, passive…a subject who can act only to consent or refuse to consent (epitomized in the case of film by Haneke's 'ideal' spectator who leaves the cinema in disgust) is, in fact denied subjectivity completely."[769] However, as Matt Hills argues in his book *The Pleasures of Horror*, debates over the activity or passivity of the spectator, often tell us less about spectatorial relations than present moralising depictions of the audience, which then become "part of the discursive production of audiences as objects

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[768] Sharrett, (2004)
[769] Catherine Wheatley, 'Contested Interactions: Watching Catherine Breillat's Scenes of Sexual Violence', in *Journal for Cultural Research,* 14, no.1, (2010), 38

calling for, or refuting, mechanisms of governmental and social control."[770] Instead he suggests we must turn our attention to the question of how audiences are discursively constructed, and how audiencehood is performed.

But while an in-depth study of how audiencehood is performed is beyond the scope of this chapter, not to mention the fact that Barker et al have already conducted a thorough investigation into the reception of sexual violence in *Irréversible,*[771]an analysis of the way in which Noé himself constructs the audience is aposite here.

The problem of arousal

Within the popular press, the question of arousal was central to many evaluations of the morality of the film. And the question of Noé's own arousal was a matter of some speculation. Richard Horgan of the online review site FilmStew.com, for example, claimed that Gaspar Noé unequivocally stated that he had actually become aroused during shooting of the rape scene.[772] While Noé himself declared that "If I had shaken the camera around…I would have been in the rapist's head. Also, I would have felt like getting horny, which I didn't want. I'm part of the male club, I know what we are."[773] This admission of the possibility of his own arousal while shooting the scene was of course, still enough to garner shock among reviewers.[774] Although in Noé's defence, in other interviews his choice of words has been less provocative, and his admission that he "would have felt ashamed of shaking the camera above her", because "That would be like sharing the rapist's point of view",[775] seems to present a clearer indication of his sense of ethical responsibility in shooting the scene. Indeed, Noé is known to have actively criticised the scene of rape in

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[770] Hills, (2005)

[771] Barker et al, (2007)

[772] Richard Horgan, 'Private Parts', *FilmStew,* 4th Aug 2004, http://www.filmstew.com/Showarticle.aspx?ContentID=9348, (accessed 24th April 2009)

[773] Morrow, (2003)

[774] 'Irréversible: Newsnight Review', *BBC News,* 6th Feb 2003, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/newsnight/review/2733807.stm, (accessed 6th Jul 2010)

[775] Hannah Magill, 'Interview with Gaspar Noé, Vincent Cassel & Monica Bellucci at the National Film Theatre', 11th Oct 2002, http://www.bfi.org.uk/features/interviews/noe.html, (accessed 24th Apr 2009)

Straw Dogs[776] for allowing the audience "the thinking space to believe that she might just be enacting a distant fantasy and enjoying herself."[777]

Nevertheless, in this admission there is also a hint of Noé's own attitude towards the spectator; that the portrayal of cinematic rape, and violence holds the ever-present possibility of arousal for the audience. And the traces of this kind of spectatorial relation remain within the film. In the first scene of violence for example, in the gay S/M club, the scene is witnessed by a number of mostly seated spectators. A film is being projected against one wall, suggesting that this is an audience assembled to watch S/M pornography. As Marcus has his arm violently broken and is threatened with rape, the assembled crowd yell and jeer, with one man clearly shown excitedly masturbating to the spectacle. When the assailant is repeatedly hit in the head with a fire extinguisher, the crowd are mostly stunned into a mute passivity, with only one or two delighted claps, and shouts of 'awesome!' coming from the off-screen space.

The setting of the scene in a gay club has drawn criticism about his portrayal of the gay community, to which I might add my own criticism over the depiction of the S/M community, which is here portrayed as those who enjoy both perpetrating and viewing violence, rather than those who engage in consensual acts. Noé however defends himself against accusations of homophobia by pointing to the fact that he makes a cameo appearance in the club. Moreover, he claims that "The point of shooting in the gay club was that I wanted a space that was entirely male…It wasn't about gay sexuality, it was about male sexuality."[778] And this, I think, is key to Noé's vision of the spectator. That is, male sexuality is at its root pathological, bound up in aggression and violence, and that scenes of violence and rape may well be consumed by the male spectator as both thrilling and arousing.

In this context, the rape scene can be seen to play on the potential for arousal. As Alex, makes her way down into the subway for example, the camera follows closely at her back, gazing lovingly at her bare shoulders and her body sheathed in "the sexiest dress we could find for her", in nude silk, "designed right on her breast".[779] There is no doubt that Alex is presented to the viewer as an erotic object, leading Felperin to suggest that "the scene is all

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[776] *Straw Dogs,* directed by Sam Peckinpah, (UK/USA: Cinerama Releasing Corporation, 1971)
[777] Chrisafis, (2002)
[778] Morrow, (2003)
[779] Jean Tang 'There are no bad deeds, just deeds', *Salon.com,* http://www.salon.com/ent/movies/int/2003/03/12/noe/print.htm, (accessed 24th Apr 2009)

about provocation", making her feel "queasy" because of its "seductive ambiguity". Indeed, Felperin bravely criticises the film for

> coaxing out of me, as a female viewer, a certain sado-masochistic engagement. From Kinsey onwards, surveys on female sexuality (admittedly many of them scientifically questionable) have found well over half the female population have fantasised at one point about being dominated, or even raped, and the film plays with and engages these fantasies. [780]

Indeed, as Alex puts it as the three central characters make their way to the fateful party, "Sometimes a woman's pleasure is the pleasure that the man feels…"

Irréversible undoubtedly flirts with the possibility of arousal when watching the scene, but the visitation of pain and suffering is too protracted, too relentless in my view, for all but the most determined to extract an erotic thrill from the scene. And indeed, as I have already suggested, the lingering shots of Alex as she enters the subway are clearly punctuated by the appearance of the unwilling witness to the scene, whose refuse to get involved and stop the rape from occurring prompts reflection on how one ought to act if one were to witness such an event. Which in turn, as I have previously argued, prompts the spectator to evaluate their own relation to the scene. The spectator then can be seen to be deliberately provoked into an eroticised relation with the image of Alex, which is then cut short by an incitement to moral reflection.

Trauma

The film can therefore be seen to deliberately provoke unpleasure, as Wheatley would phrase it. Moreover, the film can clearly be seen to position the spectator in an 'ethical' relation to the scenes of violence. It disrupts the spectator's cathartic pleasure by refusing any kind of empathetic relation to the scene of revenge. It thwarts the act of revenge itself. It employs cinematic techniques designed to provoke nausea and physical discomfort. It uses the long take in order to put the pain and suffering back into scenes of violence. And it prompts the viewer to reflect on their relationship to the central rape

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[780] Felperin, (2003)

scene. In this respect, Noé's film clear resembles Haneke's insofar as it seeks to regulate the viewer's relation to scenes of violence. The key difference between the filmmakers then, remains in their decision about whether or not the portrayal of graphic violence is justifiable.

For critics like Felperin and Edelstein, the argument that "the only moral way to present violence, so that it *hurts*",[781] is ultimately flawed, not least because the assumption that a "coolly discreet *mise en scène* automatically annuls identification with the rapist", is at best "wishful thinking" and somewhat "less than emotionally honest".[782] However, while it is true that the spectator's identification can never be guaranteed, the final part of the film gives us a clear indication of the assumptions Noé makes about the spectator's relations with the scenes of violence.

As I have already suggested, the first scenes of the film, give an extremely nihilistic view of the violent and destructive nature of masculine sexuality. And it is worth noting at this juncture that this vision gives way by the end of the film to a valorisation of the sublime, life-giving potential of femininity. For Vincent Cassel, this depiction leads him to declare the film a "pro-female movie".[783] But while it may romanticise the vision of woman-as-mother, it can by no means be considered a feminist film. The essentialist vision of gender it presents is objectionable enough, even before we note that Alex is permitted only two moments of agency within the film. One is to take a pregnancy test, which works only to secure her status as an idealised vision of femininity and to exacerbate the pathos of the ending. The other is her decision to leave the party without an escort, an act for which she is brutally punished.

Nevertheless, in the scenes in the latter part of the film, as the three make their way to the party, as Alex and Marcus awake in bed together, and in Alex's discovery of her pregnancy, there are frequent 'echoes' of Alex's rape. Alex's comment that "a woman's pleasure is the pleasure that the man feels" for example, is, in view of the spectator's knowledge of what is about to occur, exposed as hopelessly naïve and an ultimately dangerous myth about women's complicity in their sexual domination. Similarly, in the bedroom scene, when Marcus's hand covers Alex's mouth, when he pins her to the bed, spits in her face and announces "I wanna fuck your ass", the spectator is persistently reminded about what is about to happen.

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[781] Edelstein, (2003)
[782] Felperin, (2003)
[783] Jeffries, (2003)

On one level it might appear that Marcus's behaviour is simply a watered down reflection of the rapist's. Or to put it another way, the rapist represents a vision of masculine sexuality taken to its logical extreme, Marcus's expression of his desire therefore simply underlines the notions that all men, to a greater or lesser degree are brutal and violent animals. A point that is only confirmed by our knowledge that it is Pierre, the sensitive, reserved intellectual who will eventually beat a man to death. However, on another level, we might note the sense of loss and destruction that pervade these intimate scenes between Alex and Marcus. So while some critics have suggested that these are simply tender moments made ugly by their allusions to the central rape,[784] I would contend, that this sense of ease and freedom that Marcus and Alex have with one another, and indeed Alex's relation to her own sexuality, are shown to have been violently destroyed and can never be reclaimed. Indeed, given the sequencing of the scenes, one might argue that we are invited to view these scenes as memories of a lost past, a past shattered by violence and the desire for revenge.

However, this sense of loss and destruction hinges on the spectator's experience of *Nachträglichkeit*, a Freudian notion directly translated as an experience of 'afterwardness', which is used by Freud to account for the way in which traumatic moments are relived after the event. As Jean LaPlanche explains:

> Trauma, never comes simply from outside…even in the first moment it must be internalized, and then afterwards relived, revivified…trauma consists of two moments…First, there is the implantation of something coming from outside. And this experience, or the memory of it, must be reinvested in a second moment, and then it becomes traumatic.[785]

The spectator's discomfort during the scene where Alex discusses her sexuality on the subway, the 'ugliness' the spectator sees in the scene between Alex and Marcus in the bedroom, and the pathos of Alex's discovery that she is pregnant, all hinge on the spectator's internalisation of a traumatic experience. And Noé attempts to reactivate this experience of trauma again and again during the latter part of the film. Despite Noé's ostensibly nihilistic view of the male spectator, the success of these scenes hinges on the spectator having experienced the scene as a personally traumatic event, rather than an arousing sexual display.

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[784] '*Irréversible: Newsnight Review',* (2003)
[785] Cathy Caruth, 'An interview with Jean Laplanche', *Postmodern Culture,*11,no. 2, http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/pmc/V011/11.2caruth.html, (accessed 6th July 2010)

In this respect, *Irréversible* might be considered as part of the genre that Janet Walker refers to as 'trauma cinema', which "like traumatic memories…feature vivid bodily and visual sensation over 'verbal narrative and context'".[786] Like the opening scene of *Saving Private Ryan*,[787] these films make use of devices like fragmented editing and disorienting camera angles in order to "create in viewers a sense of disorientation and moral ambiguity designed to echo the experience of…trauma."[788] This use of filmic strategies designed to promote disorientation, not to mention physical nausea, is clearly depicted in the early scenes within the nightclub. Indeed, if we re-read the film through this lens we can clearly see how the film itself represents Marcus and Pierre's experience of trauma.

As Maureen Turim points out, "ironically one of the effects of trauma is to distance the self not only from one's memory, but also from the experience of others, and from any collective formation."[789] The sense of absolute alienation from both the events and the characters appearing onscreen at the beginning of the film can therefore be seen as a representation of the protagonists' experience of utter bewilderment brought about by their experience of trauma. Indeed the structure of the film as a whole might meaningfully be perceived as the Pierre and Marcus' gradual reclamation of both their memories of the night, and a return of their empathetic relations with others.

Moreover, within this context, the point at which Pierre is seen to brutally murder another man, despite his characterisation as distanced, cerebral, and lacking passion, can be seen as a filmic representation of *Nachträglichkeit.* That is, the confrontation between Marcus and this man, whom they believe to be the rapist, holds echoes of Alex's assault. The man pins Marcus to the floor, breaks his arm and threatens to rape him. Pierre responds by repeatedly smashing not just his head, but his face, an act reminiscent, though vastly exaggerated, of the rapist's beating of Alex's face against the floor of the subway after her ordeal.

However, what I want to suggest here is that *Irréversible* is a film that does more than simply represent another's trauma, rather it attempts to create an experience of 'prosthetic trauma' within the viewer. And this I think is the key difference between the visions of Haneke and Noé with regard to their

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[786] Janet Walker, 'Trauma Cinema: false memories and true experience', in *Screen,* 42, no.2 (Summer 2001), 214
[787] *Saving Private Ryan,* directed by Steven Spielberg, (USA: Dreamworks, 1998)
[788] Walker, (2001), 215
[789] Maureen Turim, 'The trauma of history: flashbacks upon flashbacks', in *Screen,* 42, no.2 (Summer 2001), 210

disciplining of the spectator in order to bring about 'appropriate' relations with the screen, and to the real world more generally. Haneke sees the 'prosthetic memories' produced as a result of watching graphic depictions of violence as being inherently dangerous, potentially leading what he characterises as a vulnerable, uncritical viewer into a callous relation with real life violence. Noé, by contrast, uses not only graphic, but highly aversive portrayals of screen violence in order produce 'prosthetic memories', which are capable of expressing not only the horror of violence itself, but its potential to destroy lives.

As Alison Landsberg might put it, Noé attempts to create "a bodily memory for those who have not lived through it", experienced in such a visceral way that it becomes "part of one's personal archive of experience, informing not only one's subjectivity, but one's relationship to the present and future".[790] Landsberg, despite the dangers inherent in the mass media's systems of representation, nevertheless sees cinema and mass media more generally as having an enormous potential to become a site of transfer, in which people might gain access to a range of "sensually immersed knowledges, knowledges which would be difficult to acquire by purely cognitive means."[791] Moreover, as the first act of violence within the film demonstrates, the creation of these prosthetic memories does not depend on an identification with either the perpetrator or the victim per se. Its success cannot be judged by whether we, as spectators, are positioned as either active or passive. Rather, it is the intensity and quality of the spectator's experience that becomes a matter of research and debate.

Conclusion

What I hope to have shown in this chapter is what links these films is more than the fact that they seek to produce an 'ethical' cinematic subject with culturally 'appropriate' responses to screen violence. In spite of their differences in terms of how they each choose to represent issues of violence on the screen,

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[790] Alison Landsberg, 'America, the Holocaust, and the Mass Culture of Memory: Toward a Radical Politics of Empathy', in *New German Critique,* 71, (1997), 66
[791] Landsberg, (1997), 66

both of these films can be seen to reflect on the horror of violence. Each attempts to force the viewer to question the narrative conventions and textual pleasures that surround violent imagery in cinema, and each expresses a fundamental revulsion and horror with regard to acts of violence. And by employing alternative strategies to both disrupt the narrative flow and challenge contemporary codes and conventions that underpin contemporary representations of violence, each offers an alternative vision of how the spectator might be forced out of a position of unthinking and complacent consumption of violence to a position of self-awareness, and critical engagement.

And while each ostensibly shares a somewhat pessimistic view of the potential spectator, constructions which mobilise many of our cultural fears about the uncritical passivity, and potential deviancy of those viewing violence, the key difference between these two filmmakers is in the strategies they use in order to prompt the spectator to engage in moments of self-reflection and to produce 'appropriate' relations with on screen violence. So while Haneke explicitly moralises, refusing to condone the act of looking by presenting images of violence, and directly confronting the spectator with his or her assumed uncritical consumption of violence, Noé sees the act of looking as a way of reinforcing the horror of violence, a way of provoking an experience of 'prosthetic trauma' within the spectator that has the capacity to reorient their relations to violence, both real and fictional.

Haneke can be seen to pursue a Brechtian strategy that seeks to challenge the spectator's passive and uncritical consumption of screen violence by forcefully reminding the viewer of their assumed investments in the text. As such, Haneke persistently indicts his audience for viewing the film. Indeed, when speaking about the moral lesson the film attempts to impart, Haneke suggested that "anyone who leaves the cinema doesn't need the film, and anyone who stays does!"[792] For many critics it was this contempt for the very people who had gone to watch his film that was the undoing of *Funny Games*. As Mark Kermode put it:

> It is this contempt… which makes Funny Games such an
> unappealing proposition. Being scared can be fun. So can
> being repulsed - up to a point. But being stiffly lectured on why
> you are such a bad person for wanting to watch any of this
> stuff in the first place gets a bit wearing. After all, who wants to

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[792] Falcon, (1998), 11

pay to see a film whose creator apparently hates them for paying to see his film?[793]

Or as Anthony Lane summed it up in his review, when Haneke chooses to break the fourth wall and query the nature of the viewer's engagement with the scene of violence before them "we don't feel nearly as chastened or ashamed as Haneke would like. We feel patronised."[794]

Haneke can therefore be seen to make use of what Sobchack terms the intersubjective quality of film in order to make the choice to view screen violence an issue of moral conduct, and more specifically to make the viewer ethically responsible for his/her own act of looking. That is, in recognising the film as an intentional 'subject' within the world, the viewer appreciates the reciprocal nature of this awareness, and accepts that s/he is also a subject for others. In the particular example of *Funny Games*, the viewer is not only aware of the way in which the film sees the world, but is forced into a recognition of how the film sees them. However, what they find is far from flattering.

Funny Games can be seen to position the spectator as a passive and morally bereft subject who needs to be prompted into a process of self-reflection and a more critical relationship with the film. In this respect, Haneke constructs the film as an ethical encounter in which the spectator is invited or impelled to pass judgement on the issue of screen violence. Crucially though, Haneke asks that this judgement is arrived at through an interrogation of oneself as a viewing subject. As such, the film is part of a wider disciplinary discourse that sees the spectator as the primary target for control, and by addressing the spectator directly within the film, Haneke attempts to mobilise a process of subjectification. That is, Haneke attempts to regulate images of screen violence, not by calling for institutional or state sponsored censorship, but by inciting the spectator to engage in a process of introspection. His hope is to draw the spectator's attention to the way in which his/her choice to consume such images makes him/her complicit in the depiction and dissemination of film violence. As such, Haneke hopes to regulate not simply through the market, but through the subjectivity of the film viewer. To paraphrase Matt Hills, to prompt the spectator to question "am I sort the sort of person who chooses to watch and take pleasure in such films?"

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[793] Mark Kermode, 'Scare us, repulse us, just don't ever lecture us', *The Observer,* 30th March 2008, http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2008/mar/30/features.horror, (accessed 14th May 2011)
[794] Anthony Lane, 'Recurring Nightmare', *The New Yorker,* 17th March 2008, http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/cinema/2008/03/17/080317crci_cinema_lane?currentPage=1, (accessed 14th May 2011)

In this respect, Haneke borrows liberally from a discourse that constructs the audience of screen violence as a 'pathological other'. However, Haneke neglects the insight that the work of researchers such as Barker et al have given us. That is, even avid consumers of violent imagery are unlikely to think of themselves in these terms. Indeed, Barker et al demonstrated that this group of viewers, like many other sections of the film-going community, produce themselves as 'normal' subjects by asserting their difference from this 'imagined' viewer. Haneke therefore mobilises many of the features of the popular debate over screen violence, but in failing to acknowledge the audience's own sense of cinematic subjectivity in the face of such depictions, he succeeds only in alienating the viewer, not only from the scenes of violence as he intends, but from the ideological point of the film itself. This strategy may have been successful for some, for one can never completely eliminate the theoretical possibility that some viewers might take up a position identical to that which Haneke intended. However, I would suggest that the conflict between the empirical audience's demonstrated desire to produce themselves as 'normal' subjects and the *Funny Games'* insistence that engaging with the film is a fundamentally pathological act ultimately provokes a rejection of the film's textual address. The only truly successfully engagement with the film is for the viewer to see it as addressing the 'imagined other', in which case Haneke's desire to provoke the spectator to reflect on themselves and their desires falls short of its target. Read in this way, the film succeeds only in repeating widespread assumptions about an 'imagined' set of 'pathological others'.

By contrast, Noé can be seen to mobilise similar debates, but is more successful in his project insofar as he addresses the spectator in quite different terms. That is, at the beginning of the film, in the S/M club, we see a clear depiction of the 'pathological others' who are aroused and excited by scenes of extreme violence. However, the spectator is never asked to align themselves with these 'others', indeed one might argue that the spectator is encouraged to position themselves as being quite different. That is, they have the opportunity to compare their own textually constructed experience of revulsion, horror and bewilderment with the excited hoots of encouragement and delight that emanate from the onscreen audience. Noé therefore creates a space for the viewer to produce themselves as a 'normal subject' who is appropriately shocked and horrified by the scene.

Rather than position the spectator as complicit with this scene of violence, Noé uses it to establish the spectator's visceral, embodied relation to

the screen. This visceral relation is far from an unthinking one however.
Instead, it produces what Sobchack might call a materialist aesthetics and
ethics, in which the spectator is encouraged to experience the scenes of
violence within *Irréversible* intersubjectively. The spectator is encouraged to
recognise that those depicted on-screen are made of the 'self-same' flesh that
they are, and as such, to experience the scenes of violence, particularly the
scene of rape, as an invitation to contemplate what it is to suffer the absolute
"*diminution* of subjectivity".[795] Crucially though, Noé invites the spectator to
experience this through the body. In this respect, he asks the viewer to give up
a Brechtian position of critical distance, and to engage with the scene by
contemplating his/her own vulnerability. The ethics of the scene therefore hinge,
not on a rejection of screen violence, but in deliberately heightening one's
response to it.

　　　However, a direct comparison between the efficacy of these two films
may be a little unfair. While I have worked hard within this thesis to demonstrate
that depictions of sexual violence and the sexualised violence to be found in
genres such as torture porn are subject to a widespread public debate over their
acceptability, it is clear to me that sexual violence is a particular cause for
concern within contemporary culture. While Haneke sets out to attack fictional
screen violence as a whole, only loosely connecting his concerns with the genre
of torture porn, Noé's film is more or less defined by the protracted scene of
rape. As such, while Haneke attempts to provoke a debate over the morality of
screen violence, by virtue of its use of sexual violence Noé's film is already
subject to a moral discourse.

　　　Indeed, following Sobchack's discussion of the scene of death within
documentary, I would like to contend that within the context of British culture, in
which scenes of sexual violence are intensively regulated by the BBFC by virtue
of their potential to produce harm, filmmaker's are all but obliged to inscribe
such scenes as ethical spaces. That is, the manner in which the scene of
sexual violence is depicted within a film is open to "slow scrutiny"[796] by the
spectator and the censor alike. In this respect, the filmmaker must visibly
respond to the fact he has broken a visual taboo and justify this cultural
transgression. As Sobchack puts it, the filmmaker must present a "morally
framed vision" that marks "the ethical stance of the filmmaker" as being "not only

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[795] Sobchack, (2004), 287-8
[796] Sobchack, (2004), 243

responsive but responsible".[797] However, it would be wrong to assume that this is merely the demand of the censors, and similarly, such questions are not confined to an analysis of the text. Indeed, it is telling how frequently Noé was asked in both interviews and in Q&A sessions to account for his choices within the scene. In this respect, we might see these encounters with the both the press and the public as a series of concrete social situations in which Noé was asked not merely to justify his choices, but to 'perform' his ethical relation to the scene of sexual violence.

As Sobchack suggests though, it is not only the filmmaker who must account for his/her ethical relation to the scene of sexual violence, "the viewer is – and is held – ethically responsible for his or her visible visual response."[798] On the one hand, Sobchack suggests that the viewer is asked to judge the filmmaker for his/her visible visual choices in the representation, and on the other s/he is asked to judge his/her own ethical response to the scene. Sobchack's characterisation of the culturally transgressive visual encounter therefore suggests that the viewer is expected to engage in a process of self-reflection. But further, as I have tried to show within this thesis, the viewer must also 'perform' their ethical response to such images, not just to reassure themselves of the appropriateness of those responses, they must also perform their ethical relation for others.

First and foremost, the viewer's response is open to the immediate scrutiny of the wider audience during viewing. As I have already suggested, what is considered an appropriate reading or response to the screen is highly culturally specific, and will vary amongst specific film viewing communities. What is acceptable at a local multiplex will therefore differ from a screening directed at a cult audience at the local arthouse cinema. Moreover, not all viewers choose to abide by the cultural mores of the viewing context; a fact that is demonstrated in the last chapter by the anecdotal reports of individuals being evicted from theatres by members of staff. However, the fact that responses are regulated in this way suggests that there is a high degree of consensus within particular reception contexts regarding to how one ought to visibly respond to such depictions.

Moreover, as I sought to show in the last chapter, viewers also perform their ethical relation to particular films and to scenes of sexual violence after the fact. As we saw, in user-generated reviews and discussions individuals

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[797] Sobchack, (2004), 243
[798] Sobchack, (2004), 244

recounted their experiences and frequently produced themselves as spectatorial subjects in the course of these exchanges. In the process they could be seen to situate themselves in relation to debates about 'pathological others', and to interrogate the nature of their enjoyment of these films. Again while such a performance is profoundly shaped by the community mores of the particular web space, viewers can nevertheless be seen to perform a predominantly ethical relation to the text, at least insofar as they attempted to produce themselves as 'normal viewing subjects'. Though once again it is worth pointing out, that even here there are significant moments of resistance and refusal.

Nevertheless, this suggests that Sobchack is correct in her assertion that the viewer is held accountable for their responses to scenes of sexual violence by those around them, and in many respects they are expected to 'perform' an appropriate relation to the text. But perhaps more interesting is the notion that the prevailing culture may profoundly shape the "response-ability" of any individual viewer. That is, that the particular discourses that circulate around depictions of sexual violence may actually work to 'sensitise' the viewer in particular ways. In viewing a scene of brutal rape like that found in *Irréversible* it is not only culturally appropriate, but highly culturally desirable for the viewer to enter into a relation with the scene that will produce a profoundly aversive affect. Indeed as some viewers noted in the previous chapter, not being appropriately horrified or sickened by such a depiction is a significant source of concern, both for oneself and for others. In this respect, we might suggest that the viewer is in some sense prompted by the wider discourses of cinema to actively pursue an intersubjective relation to such images, to engage with them both viscerally and empathetically, as a way of producing these appropriate responses for oneself. In this respect, the viewer of scenes of sexual violence can be considered to be regulated, not only from the outside, through cultural expectations and concrete performative encounters with others, but to actively regulate their own spectatorial relations in order to produce themselves as a 'normal' and 'appropriate' cinematic subject. Crucially though, we must recognise that the film itself and its particular form of address is merely one discourse among many that seek to produce 'appropriate' relations between viewers and scenes of violence.

Disciplining the Spectator:

Subjectivity, the Body and Contemporary Spectatorship

Conclusion

All research projects are by their very definition a learning experience. And many, like this project, bring about somewhat unexpected results. So while this project began with the relatively simple premise of reinserting the body back into film theory in a way that accounted for the constructed nature of the spectator's corporeal experience, what I discovered in the process of analysis was wholly unanticipated. My initial plan of revealing the constructed nature of spectatorship generally, and the specific disciplinary practices that were employed by film texts, film marketing, press reviews and popular discussions of mainstream film, clearly demonstrated that although the body was widely neglected within film theory, it was nevertheless a central term within discourse, a key site for the creation of the filmic experience in post-classical, high concept cinema, and a source of information about the quality and effectiveness of a film for everyday viewers.

Indeed what the first part of this thesis demonstrates is that, contrary to the assertions of metapsychological theory, classical spectatorship is not an

inevitable result of the cinematic apparatus, but as film, theatre and social historians have discovered, it is the result of a whole series of disciplinary practices and regulatory decisions that worked together to subdue the audience, orient them to the screen, and engage in a privatised relationship with the images and narrative presented there. In this respect, spectatorship was formed not only through the development of particular textual practices but through the regulation, monitoring and policing of spectators' material bodies in the physical spaces of reception.

Classical spectatorship should therefore be considered to be the result of a series of disciplinary practices that exert control over the body of the individual. It is important to note, however, that these regulatory practices that occurred within nineteenth century theatres and early twentieth century cinemas, were not simply imposed on the viewing public by theatre managers. Indeed, while cinema owners clearly pursued strategies designed to reduce social interaction and activity within the auditorium, like dimming the house lights and fixing the chairs to the floor, facing in the direction of the screen, these tactics were supplemented by the audiences' own concern with displaying appropriate forms of behaviour in public spaces.   As such the docility of the spectating body is not simply a precondition for classical spectatorship, but a normatively defined social practice that is performed by the individual in the process of viewing.

In this respect the early history of cinema can be seen as a period in which models of appropriate behaviour were being not only being codified but were also being internalised by the spectator. The docility of the spectating body was therefore not only stringently policed by the institution, but was subject to social sanction by other members of the audience. These deeply normative social judgements, I would suggest, led to the willing subjectification of the individual, which ultimately produced a peculiarly modern form of subjectivity: the spectator. The history of spectatorship is therefore both a history of institutional control over the body, but more importantly, it is an account of the individual's own adoption of techniques of the self, that allowed entry into a pleasurable engagement with the cinematic text.

As a result, the film text should by no means be considered the singular or even the primary site in the formation of the corporeal address. Rather, as I have sought to show, in the wake of competition with domestic media technologies, cinema has attempted to define itself precisely as an 'experience', rather than a simple source of narrative pleasure. Moreover, the specificity of the cinematic experience is absolutely bound to its delivery of a corporeal mode

of address: whether that be the thrill-ride of an action film or the having your skin crawl in a horror film. Mainstream film marketing therefore promotes its products on their ability to provoke physical excitement, kinetic effects and a visceral experience, for the spectator. But perhaps more importantly, viewers' themselves actively pursue intense forms of physical experience within the cinema.

What I have sought to show, however, is that these forms of promotion should be considered to be disciplinary practices central to the constitution of the corporeal address within cinema. In particular, these discourses demand that the viewer prepare themselves for the experience they will encounter within the cinema, particularly in the case of violent and horrific films. And what I have sought to argue is that this incitement to prepare oneself prompts the viewer to engage in a process of constructing a specific form of cinematic subjectivity suitable to the specific address employed by these films. As such, film marketing does not simply promise to deliver physical sensations and thrills to the spectator, but actively encourages him/her to enter into a particular mode of reception, to actively create themselves as corporeal subjects in order to fully appreciate the particular form of experiential address offered by the film.

Moreover, the controversy that surrounds particularly violent or horrific films can be seen to operate as an incitement to discourse, effectively prompting the spectator to engage in a process of monitoring their relations and responses to the depictions on-screen. On the one hand, this process of self-monitoring, self-regulation and self-control exhibited by the viewers of violent film actively contributes to the intensity of the experience, simply by heightening their awareness of their own physical and emotional responses to the film. But on the other hand, this process of self-monitoring also begins to implicate the 'self' in the process of film viewing. And this was key to the entirely unexpected findings of the research project as a whole.

That is, while a study of mainstream cinema yielded information about the centrality of the body and the corporeal address within contemporary cinema, underpinning these everyday mediations of the film event was something darker and perhaps more instructive in the mechanisms of cinema's disciplinary practices. What this project slowly revealed is that the physical address of cinema was a source of considerable cultural anxiety. And an exploration of the limits of this form of corporeal address began to reveal something altogether more profound, namely the degree to which the viewer's

subjectivity and sense of self was bound up in the peculiarly corporeal quality of contemporary cinema's spectatorial relations.

Until this point, my analysis of the construction of the spectator had revealed only the extent to which the disciplinary practices of the film text, marketing campaigns, press reports and popular discussions of cinema represented "a 'mechanics of power'…[which] defined how one may have a hold over others' bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes". [799] That is, how spectatorial relations were being shaped through discourse in order to promote and intensify a corporeal engagement with the filmic text. My analysis of the regulatory discourses of cinema demonstrated something quite different.

Of course, the body remained a central term within the discourse of media effects and concern about film's capacity to arouse its viewers, both sexually and in the more diffuse sense of heightening their autonomic levels of excitement, took a privileged place in regulatory discourses. However, at the point at which the corporeal address of cinema reached the limits of social acceptability, the discursive construction of the spectator attained a wholly different character, and the disciplinary strategies found within these discourses, began to address themselves more thoroughly to a normative policing of spectatorial subjectivity.

Within the discourses of media effects in particular, male sexuality and its capacity for arousal in the face of extreme violence represented a key fear. As such this perceived potential for deviancy stood out as a key focus for research, a target of popular anxieties, a crucial determinant in regulatory decisions. And as a result of this personification of the problem of 'extreme' cinema, it became increasingly clear that in contemporary cinema, debates over the acceptability of filmic representations of violence, and more particularly sexual violence, were focused less on the intrinsic qualities of the text and more on the assumed qualities of the potential spectator.

More importantly, within popular debate about controversial cinema, the question of regulation rarely called for the censoring of texts. Rather, within this discursive arena, regulation was constructed either as a matter of eschewing these texts altogether, by effectively 'policing' these inappropriate materials through the market, or more surprisingly, it became a matter of regulating spectators themselves. In this respect, in my study of *Wolf Creek,* there were

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[799] Foucault, (1984), 182

frequent explicit calls and implicit suggestions that those who viewed this kind of problematic filmic material should be subject to social sanctions, though throughout the debate, a number of normative strategies were employed by those who did not see the representation of (implied) sexual violence as suitable material for 'entertainment'. Commentators frequently 'problematised', 'stigmatised', and even 'pathologised' those who were considered to 'enjoy', 'embrace' or simply want to see the film. This problematisation of the viewer extended from simple name calling through to suggestions that those who choose to watch a film like this are in need of 'introspection', and at the furthest extreme, professional help for their 'sick minds'.

Implicit, in these somewhat bullying reviews was a concern to prevent and avoid inappropriate relations with the screen. But perhaps the most surprising, and unexpected, outcome of this research was the discovery of the extent to which viewer's themselves internalised these characterisations, using them either as a means of resisting their construction as 'sick' and/or 'deviant', or as a means of evaluating their own relations with the screen and bringing them into line with 'acceptable' models of response. In this sense, the subjectification of film regulation operates in two senses. In the first instance, we can trace the construction of the spectatorial subject that defines the need for continued institutional regulation and/or the use of market forces to prevent the continued circulation of the cinematic text. While in the second instance, we can begin to address the ways in which the individual spectator internalises and mobilises this construction, and begins to shape their own sense of identity and/or subjectivity in light of it.

This subjectification of film regulation, can also be traced within film texts themselves. And in this respect Michael Haneke's *Funny Games* and Gaspar Noé's *Irréversible*, provided two illuminating case studies. In an analysis of each of these films there are clear manifestations of the 'deviant' spectator constructed within the regulatory discourses. The possibility of the spectator's enjoyment and arousal, and the potential for screen violence to achieve lasting effects was present within the films. And in both cases, the director's constitution of the spectator was, at least initially, a thoroughly pathological vision. Moreover, in each case, the problem of screen violence was to be solved through a realignment of the spectator's relations with the portrayal of the violent act. As such, both of these films represent key texts in the process of bringing about the increasing subjectification of film regulation.

But where Haneke's film suggests that the only appropriate response to screen violence is for the spectator to refuse to engage, and ideally to leave the cinema – effectively regulating through the market - Noé adopts and intensifies the corporeal address as a method of provoking aversive responses from the viewer. Nevertheless, in each case, the director can be seen to be targeting the spectator as the key site of filmic regulation, and engaging in a process that seeks to 'discipline' the spectator's relationship to on-screen violence as a means of bringing about what they consider to be 'appropriate' relations with the text. What the comparison of these two films neatly demonstrates is that the debate over exactly what is appropriate is a continuing one, and the outcome has by no means been decided.

Inevitably, a research project like this has its limitations, and moreover, raises far more questions that it is able to answer. The study for example has clearly focused on the question of adult viewing, leaving unquestioned – or at least unanalysed – the very specific constructions and disciplinary practices that pervade children's viewing. And while I feel I have demonstrated that regulatory discourses are thoroughly gendered, specifically problematising male sexuality, space has not permitted an analysis of the particular ways in which women are constructed, addressed or indeed how they respond to these discourses. And indeed, while I feel have successfully shown that individuals internalis, and make sense of their own spectatorial relations in light of the figures of deviancy that circulate around 'extreme cinema', the specific nature of this internalisation and the problems it raises for the subject's relations to itself have not been addressed, although, this key aspect of my findings demands further research and exposition.

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