Physical Spectatorship and the Mutilation Film

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Abstract

Physical Spectatorship and the Mutilation Film

This thesis explores what I call 'physical spectatorship' as it is generated by a group of films concerned with the mutilation of the human body. Focusing on the representation of mutilation on the screen and the physical responses this evokes, the thesis is organised around the study of a series of dynamic engagements that reconfigure the film-viewer relationship; these include: corporeal mimicry and the cinematic visualisations of mutilation; generalised anxiety and experimental use of sound; and the nausea generated by audio-visual techniques that both signify and locate the filmic gut in the viewer's body.

Combining close textual analyses with theoretical approaches, this thesis draws upon psychoanalytic, phenomenological and feminist theories of film and spectatorship. Throughout the chapters, my argument builds upon the work of Vivian Sobchack and Laura Marks in order to interrogate further what might be meant by the notion of the embodied spectator. The chapters explore this notion, alongside that of the film viewer, to generate a dialogue with previous theorists of the cinematic spectator, including Christian Metz and Richard Rushton.

Exploring through close textual analyses the specific filmic techniques that generate intense physical responses, this thesis argues that the mutilation film demands a rethinking of some of the key categories in theories of spectatorship. Extending across national cinemas and reaching beyond conventional generic distinctions, the mutilation film produces a visceral aesthetic that has yet to be analysed. Focusing on particular aspects of the mutilation film, such as the assault narrative sequence, use of extreme frequencies and haptic sounds and images, the thesis offers detailed readings of the following texts: *Dans Ma Peau* (Marina de Van, 2002)*, Irréversible* (Gaspar Noé, 2002)*, Saw II* (Darren Lynn Bousman, 2005) *Saw III* (Darren Lynn Bousman, 2006) *Saw IV* (Darren Lynn Bousman, 2007) *Saw V* (David Hackl, 2008) *Saw VI* (Kevin Greutert, 2009) *Saw 3D* (Kevin Greutert, 2010), *Hostel* (Eli Roth, 2005), *À l'intérieur* (Alexandre Bustillo and Julien Maury, 2007), *The Human Centipede: First Sequence* (Tom Six, 2009) and *The Human Centipede: Full Sequence* (Tom Six, 2011).

The analyses that form this thesis demonstrate the problems with separating notions of the 'spectator as textual construction' from that of the 'viewer as physically embodied'; yet these readings also indicate the necessity of continuing the task of conceptualising their interrelatedness, rather than simply using them interchangeably. The conclusion argues that the concept of *physical spectatorship* offers one way to understand how particular contemporary aesthetics have reconfigured the boundary between viewer and film.

<u>Declaration</u>

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those photographs you gave me forever; finally, LQ. My LQ. What can I say? It's been a long road ain't it? You've been putting out countless fires for many years, from talking me through an under-graduate extension, to putting me up when things got too much to bear in Manchester (and for this I also thank you, Andy; our discussions on religion and philosophy never cease to remind (and amaze) me of my stubbornness in the face of your reasoned logic; and two extraordinary cats – Digit (Didge) and Pippin (Pippalina) – who make waking up an absolute delight). I don't really know how to let you know what you mean to me, but I'm certain I'll find the words at some point, no doubt soaked in wine and tears – I'm sure you're looking forward to that!

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This thesis is dedicated to my father, Mike Wilson.

<u>Introduction</u>

When *Irréversible* (Gaspar Noé, 2002) was screened at the Cannes Film Festival in 2002, David Ansen, in a review for *Newsweek*, predicted that it would become the most 'walked-out-of' movie of 2003 (Ansen, 2003). However, by the time this article was written, the film had already received the Bronze Horse Award at the Stockholm Film Festival 2003, and would then go on to win the San Diego Film Critics Society Award (SDFCS) for Best Foreign Language film in 2003. In 2000, Rotterdam Film Festival showed *Ôdishon/ Audition* (Takashi Miike, 2000), where it was met by 'the highest audience walk-out count' journalist Tom Mes had ever been 'lucky enough to witness' (Mes, 2001). Its director, Takashi Miike, won two awards for his film that year: the FIBRESCI Prize and the KNF Award. *Ôdishon* then went on to become a 'worldwide festival and art-house favourite' (Mes, 2001). Marina de Van's debut, *Dans Ma Peau* (2002), won an award at the Fant-Asia Film Festival in 2003 where, according to film critic Peter Bradshaw, writing for *The Guardian,* the film 'had people staggering for the aisles here, hands clamped over mouths, cheeks ballooning' (Bradshaw, 2003). The most striking aspect of these films is not that they won an award or caused a mass walk-out, but that there is something about each of them that has resulted in both the highest of praise and the lowest of criticism. The disparate reception of these films can be argued to be the result of a clash between 'low' exploitation movies and 'high' art cinema.[1]

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[1] In the introduction to their book, *Global Art Cinema,* Rosalind Gait and Karl Schoonover provide a number of different ways art cinema is understood while noting that, as a label, it can be unreliable

The meeting of popular and art cinema that produces a hybrid distinctive for its challenging modes of spectatorship, has been argued to be a trend that has recently proliferated throughout Europe. Tanya Horeck and Tina Kendall's recent edited collection titled *The New Extremism in Cinema* (2011) focuses on particular films to emerge from Europe over the past two decades that bring together aspects of art cinema (for example, a disregard for the general 'rules' of 'classical cinema' that have been most closely associated with Hollywood cinema) and horror iconography (chiefly, disturbing representations of violence directed towards the human body),[2] for example, *Sombre* (Philippe Grandrieux, 1998) and *Trouble Every Day* (Claire Denis, 2001). This style potentially stands them apart from the proliferation of another group of films that have emerged, pre-dominantly from North America, over the past decade that are also preoccupied with the threat of human bodily mutilation: *Saw* (James Wan, 2004)*, Saw II* (Darren Lynn Bousman, 2005)*, Saw III* (Darren Lynn Bousman, 2006)*, Saw IV* (Darren Lynn Bousman, 2007)*, Saw V* (David Hackl, 2008)*, Saw VI* (Kevin Greutert, 2009)*, Saw 3D* (Kevin Greutert, 2010)*, Hostel* (Eli Roth, 2005)*, Hostel: Part II* (Eli Roth, 2007)*, Hostel: Part III* (Scott Spiegel, 2011)*, Wrong Turn* (Rob Schmidt, 2003)*, Wrong Turn 2: Dead End* (Joe Lynch, 2007)*, Wrong Turn 3: Left for Dead* (Declan O'Brien, 2009)*, Wrong Turn 4: Bloody Beginnings* (Declan O'Brien, 2011)*, Wrong Turn 5: Bloodlines* (Declan O'Brien, 2012), *Captivity* (Roland Joffé, 2007)*, See No Evil* (Gregory Dark, 2006), *Paradise Lost* (John Stockwell, 2006)*, Vacancy* (Nimród Antal, 2007)*,* and *Shuttle* (Edward

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because it is so flexible (2010: 3). Drawing on their definitions, my use of 'art cinema' here points to the location of the mentioned films as outside of Hollywood cinema and intersecting, at times, with avant-garde, largely through their experimental use of sound, camera-work and narrative structure. This will be explored more fully in relation to *Dans Ma Peau* (Chapter Three) *Irréversible* and *À l'intérieur* (Alexandre Bustillo and Julien Maury, 2007) (Chapter Four) and *The Human Centipede II: Full Sequence* (Tom Six, 2011) (Chapter Five).

[2] How and why these representations are disturbing is a focus of this thesis.

Anderson, 2008). These latter films, often dubbed 'torture porn',[3] and thus, in commercial terms, firmly established within a contemporary sub-genre of horror cinema, are criticised for being sadistic, exploitative, gratuitous and misogynistic.[4] Furthermore, it has been suggested that they do not 'situate sex and violence as a means of interrogating the relationship between films and their spectators' in the same way as the European art/genre cinema hybrids (Horeck and Kendall, 2011: 2). However, I suggest that there is something in all of these films that extends across national cinemas, and reaches beyond conventional generic distinctions, to produce a visceral aesthetic – that is, the look and sound of mutilation that strain against notions of the viewer's body – that has yet to be analysed in film studies. I refer to all films mentioned above as examples of the 'mutilation film'. The impression of corporeality that this term evokes indicates not just the mutilation on the screen, but also, and perhaps more significantly, the modes of physical spectatorship the films construct.

This thesis is organised around a series of case studies: *Saw II, Saw III, Saw IV, Saw V, Saw VI, Saw 3D, Hostel, Dans Ma Peau, Irréversible, À l'intérieur* (Alexandre Bustillo and Julien Maury, 2007), *The Human Centipede: First Sequence* (Tom Six, 2009) and *The Human Centipede: Full Sequence* (Tom Six, 2011). Close textual

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[3] David Edelstein is the first known critic to use this term in his 2006 article for *New York Movies,* 'Now Playing at Your Local Multiplex: Torture Porn'.

[4] For example, in his article 'All Stripped Down' (2009) Dean Lockwood describes the reception of the marketing campaign for *Captivity*. The creator of the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), Joss Whedon, Lockwood states, objected to the misogyny he saw as inherent in the posters with the words 'abduction', 'confinement', 'torture' and 'termination' (40). One reviewer for *Hostel* made the familiar argument that its violence is unnecessary, unjustified and exploitative (Stina Chyn, *Film Threat,* 2006), while another considers it to be one of the most misogynistic films ever made (Nathan Lee, *New York Times,* 2006). Popular reviewer Roger Ebert labels the horrors of *Saw* as sadistic (*Chicago Sun-Times*, 2004). The charges of misogyny, sadism, gratuity and exploitation can be seen to appear again and again in the reviews of contemporary horror popularly known as 'torture porn'.

analyses of these films explore ways in which modes of spectatorship destabilise a number of dichotomies including viewer/film, subject/object, interiorities/exteriorities and biology/technology. My research questions are: how does the mutilation film generate physical responses? How can we think about physical spectatorship and the mutilation film to build upon theories of embodiment in the film-viewing relationship? How does the mutilation film complicate notions of viewer and spectator, and how does the concept of physical spectatorship offer a way of understanding the way these terms have been reconfigured by contemporary aesthetics?

The choice of these particular films had two stages, the first being directly related to their interrogative and disturbing modes of spectatorship. Through my own viewing and, to a degree, readings of other people's experiences,[5] the films mentioned above, amongst many other mutilation films that will be referenced throughout this thesis, seem to generate powerful physical responses in the viewer. Above, I cited Peter Bradshaw who, writing a review of *Dans Ma Peau* for *The Guardian,* claimed to have seen people leaving the theatre with outward signs of nausea. Also writing for *The Guardian,* journalist James Anthony observed that *Saw III* managed to elicit an 'involuntary wince and a groan' from a 'horror-hardened audience' (2008). Terms such as 'aggressive', 'nauseating', 'shocking', 'heart-racing' and 'sickening' belong to an embodied discourse; I intend to build on this language to explore further, and

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[5] This includes critic reviews as well as scholarly articles. Reactions to the mutilation film often use terms that belong to a discourse of embodied response. The following examples are critical reviews: 'gruesome' and 'repugnant' (James Verniere, *Boston Herald,* 2006 on *Hostel*); 'taut thriller' (Mark Deming, *Rotten Tomatoes,* 2005 on *Wolf Creek* (Greg Mclean, 2005); 'chilling' (Kim Newman, *Empire,* undated review for *Ôdishon/ Audition*). Film scholar Carrie Tarr states, in her article 'Director's Cuts,' that *Dans Ma Peau* is 'not for the squeamish' (2006: 80); and scholar Tim Palmer says that *Dans Ma Peau* employs 'sensory impressions' (2007: 178). I aim to build on this language by exploring how the mutilation film engages with the body.

articulate, the sensations I felt across, through and within my body when watching these mutilation films. Throughout this thesis, I aim to focus on *how* these films are able to evoke such specific responses.

The second stage of choosing the above case studies occurred after watching a wide range of mutilation films and producing analyses that interrogate the film-viewer relationship. From this process, three distinct modes of physicality began to emerge. First, a large number of films demonstrate a concern with the visual detail of mutilation, where human body parts, waste and viscera frequently seep, ooze or explode onto the screen, often as a result of acts of torture. The physical responses generated by these films are intensely focused towards specific parts of the body in front of the screen (that of the viewer) and yet are strongly tied to the mutilating and mutilated image. Second, a significant number of films represent mutilation predominantly through their soundscape, creating a penetrative and invasive physical response that extends beyond the object of anxiety (the disintegrating human body). Third, a smaller number of films are dominated by the anxiety and desire towards nausea and vomiting generated by audio-visual techniques that both signify and locate the filmic gut in the viewer's body. There are, of course, significant overlaps that blur the boundaries of these categories; however, to provide structure to this study, and to avoid a large amount of repetition, I chose a relatively small number of films that allowed me to explore physicality in relation to focused anxiety, generalised anxiety and nausea-centred anxiety in turn, and to consider how these responses complicate certain key concepts in film studies and spectatorship theory.

Spectatorship gained significant theoretical attention in the 1970s in an attempt to fully explore, and potentially explain, the engagement between film and viewer. Jean-Louis Baudry (1974) and Christian Metz (1975) were forerunners in this area, both pointing towards the idea that the film-spectator relationship is explicable through theories of early subject formation.[6] Notions of voyeurism and the pleasures in looking are prominent in these early works. Subsequent theories of spectatorship developed these arguments to highlight and complicate the idea that cinema reproduces dominant ways of seeing.[7] The focus on the gaze, image and psyche in spectatorship studies generated various critiques of psychoanalytic formulations of this area of film studies. One of the main arguments of these criticisms is that such

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[6] In 'Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus,' Jean-Louis Baudry likens spectator experience at the cinema with the Lacanian mirror stage (where the child imagines mastery of the body through an identification with the image), thus cinema constitutes the spectator as a 'transcendental subject,' (1999: 350-352). In 'The Imaginary Signifier,' Metz builds on this idea by arguing that the spectator positioning is pre-Oedipal, which is further complicated by a lack defined by the absence of film, which in turn calls attention to the imaginary dimension of the unity between spectator and film. Metz also equates this process with Lacanian notions of the 'mirror stage' theory because 'during showing we are, like the child, in a sub-motor and hyper-perceptive state; because, like the child again, we are prey to the imaginary, the double, and are so paradoxically through a real perception' (1999: 803). However, he goes further to suggest that it differs from the mirror of childhood because 'this mirror [the cinema] returns us everything but ourselves, because we are wholly outside it' (1999: 803-804). The mutilation film strains against the theory that the spectator/viewer is in some way absent or transcendent during the film-viewing experience. The mutilation film, in some way, *does* return us to ourselves. How it does this is a focus of this thesis.

[7] In 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975), Laura Mulvey argues that 'the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form,' situating the male spectator in a mastery and sadistic position (2000: 239). In 'Film and the Masquerade' (1991), Mary Ann Doane attempts to theorise the female spectator, questioning 'what is there to prevent her from reversing the relation and appropriating the gaze for her own pleasure?' (2000: 249) and suggesting that the 'female can pretend that she is other', viewing the image from a male position (2000: 253). Gaylyn Studlar, in her article 'Masochism and the Perverse Pleasures of the Cinema' (1985), considers the advantages of emphasising the relationship between masochism and visual pleasure, arguing that a masochist aesthetic satisfies the drives to be both sexes. Carol Clover considers horror spectatorship in relation to masochism, suggesting that the male spectator derives pleasure from an identification with the persecuted female victim (1992). Similarly, Tania Modleski argues that a fascination with femininity in Hitchcock films 'throws masculine and identity into question and crisis' (2005: 89). However, in spite of the criticisms spectatorship theories have garnered due to an apparent emphasis on the gaze, scholars such as Doane and Kaja Silverman have theorised spectatorship in relation to sound (see, for example, Doane's 'The Voice in the Cinema' (1985), where she argues that audiences understand visual limitations as not prescribing aural limitations, and considers the importance of sound in constituting the body in and of the film; and Silverman's *The Acoustic Mirror,* where she explores the extent to which sound configures sexual difference). Rather than turn away from spectatorship theory entirely (unlike for example, film scholar Carl Plantinga who, in his book *Moving Viewers* (2009) suggests we abandon notions of spectator as textual construction altogether (231), I propose the continued interrogation of the use and meaning of such terms.

frameworks are inadequate for taking into account the body of the viewer.[8] The two scholars who have attempted to return the body of the viewer to cinema spectatorship theory, and that are most influential throughout this thesis, are Vivian Sobchack and Laura Marks. Here, I will introduce their ideas regarding this topic, and outline how I aim to engage with, and build on, their work.

Sobchack begins her book, *The Address of the Eye* (1992), by observing that, at her time of writing, the two dominant theoretical paradigms of American cinema studies were Lacanian psychoanalysis and neo-Marxism. From within this context, Sobchack proposes another approach – that of phenomenology – to understand the 'experience' of cinema. This term 'experience' appears to be placed against concepts of abstract theories of spectatorship. In her book *Carnal Thoughts,* Sobchack elaborates on this by expressing how she is frequently 'struck by the gap that exists between our actual *experience* of the cinema and the *theory* that we academic film scholars construct to explain it' and in doing so we, unfortunately, 'explain it away' (2004: 53), thus avoiding, she argues, what should be celebrated: that we 'are not exempt from sensual being at the movies' (2004: 60). However, Sobchack also concedes the drawbacks of the term 'experience', noting that it is 'sloppy', 'liberal', and that language is not adequate to encompass or describe it (1992: xiv). Yet, if we

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[8] In *The Address of the Eye* (1992) Vivian Sobchack turned away from notions of analysis – refusing psychoanalytic and Marxist theoretical structures – to explore that of experience through an engagement with phenomenology (xv); Steven Shaviro, in *The Cinematic Body* (1993), argues that 'representation' and 'discourse' belong to the realm of the disembodied, which leads him to reject the psychoanalytic model in favour of a varied approach, drawing on the works of Georges Bataille, Walter Benjamin, Maurice Blanchot, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault and Félix Guattari (viii-ix); similarly, Anna Powell in *Deleuze and Horror Film* (2005) argues that '[t]heories of representation and narrative structure neglect the primacy of corporeal affect' making psychoanalysis an 'inadequate key to unlock' the various levels of horror (2, 1); and Plantinga (2009) suggests that theories of affect and emotion in film theory have been neglected through an over-reliance on psychoanalytic models of spectatorship and, instead, draws strongly on cognitive science (8).

are to think about the different ways physicality can be constructed, surely it is necessary to think about how this is experienced differently within and across the senses. The effect, or affect, of a film on the viewer evokes the 'processual experience'[9] of 'watching' the film, and, indeed, the use of the term 'experience' is an attempt to problematise the importance language places on sight over and above every other sense involved in cinema-going i.e. to watch a film, to see a film, and to 'read' a film. There is, therefore, a strain between language and experience, and herein lies the appeal of phenomenology; it has a 'potential for opening up and destabilizing language in the very process of its description of the phenomena of experience' (1992: xviii). Although I do not directly engage with phenomenology as an approach to theorising modes of physical spectatorship, I draw on Sobchack's work in my textual analyses to help move towards a theory (that also foregrounds the viewer's body) of the responses the mutilation film generates.

Throughout this thesis, I propose that the mutilation film also forcefully destabilises the language we use to describe, or explain, the film-viewer relationship; it does so, I suggest, through a generation and manipulation of physicality that uncomfortably brings to the fore embodied modes of existence. In the following chapters, I refer to the viewer's body, corporeality and physicality, as well as specific parts of the body (for example, the middle ear, the inner ear, and the digestive tract). In all instances, I am indicating a mode of embodiment; however, I repeatedly attempt to complicate both the notion of a body that pre-exists the text, and that of physicality that is constructed by the film. In *Carnal Thoughts,* Sobchack argues that there is 'extensive contemporary literature' in the humanities that focuses 'objectively (but

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[9] Powell also uses the term 'experience' to describe the film viewing (2005: 21).

sometimes superficially) on "the body"' (2004: 2). By this, Sobchack is referring to the way the body is often thought about in an abstracted fashion, that which always belongs to someone else other than me. Counter to this, Sobchack draws on phenomenology to focus on the lived body, that is, on 'what it means to be "embodied"' (1). To be embodied, Sobchack explains, is to be an objective *subject* and a subjective *object* – 'sentient, sensual, and sensible' (2). Part of being sensible is to be perceptive of something, in this instance, a perception of our own embodiment. The abstracted body – that is other and separate from me – is distanced from this perception. However, as Marks observes in her book *The Skin of the Film*, there is a very good reason for this distance of embodied perception to be maintained. As she states, a 'certain degree of separation from the body is necessary in order for our bodies to function' otherwise we 'would be so attuned to the universe within that it would be impossible to focus on the world around us' (2000: 132). The mutilation film belies this distance that is, arguably, necessary for day-to-day functioning, by drawing attention to the subjective and objective dimensions of embodied existence, and, in doing so, constructs the particular mode of embodiment that Sobchack refers to in her work, by recalling us, as viewers, to our own sense of corporeality. The mutilation film strains against this notion of an abstract body, yet the physicality it generates is an abstract concept because it is a filmic construction and, therefore, does not pre-exist the text. The viewer is thus placed at the uncomfortable intersection of their own perceived embodiment, and that of abstracted and fluid physicality.

A particularly difficult aspect of exploring the physicality of the mutilation film is considering how an audio-visual medium can engage with other bodily senses to

become a multi-sensorial medium – one that is not solely dependent on seeing and hearing. Seeing and hearing are, of course, embodied senses. Although they can be perceived across distances, thereby creating the illusion that they are in some way detached from corporeality, these senses are made possible through particular body parts: the auricle, canal, drum, ossicles and cochlea of the ear; and the cornea, lens, retina, optic disc and optic nerve of the eye. As Anna Powell observes in her book *Deleuze and Horror Film,* the information taken in by the eyes – which are, of course, rooted in flesh – does not remain purely visual (2005: 04). Marks studies this phenomenon further, and argues that certain examples of intercultural cinema mobilise senses beyond those of seeing and hearing to create a physical impression of other cultures. Marks explores the notion of an 'embodied visuality' that does not hold vision as master over the object it sees, but rather 'yields to the thing seen, a vision that is not merely cognitive but acknowledges its location in the body' (2000: 151, 132). Following Marks, I question what it might mean for a mutilation-image to acknowledge its location in the body, and how a sense of touch in relation to the film-viewer relationship may be theorised in these instances. I suggest that particular examples of the mutilation film repeatedly generate this level of sensorial engagement – exactly how this is achieved will be considered through close textual analyses throughout the body of the thesis.[10]

An image that finds its location in the body generates a haptic mode of visuality, through which seeing something evokes the sense of touch. It is, as Marks states, 'as

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[10] This involves close textual analysis of visual representations of mutilation. Shaviro suggests, in relation to the optical detail of mutilation, that 'when the flesh is pushed to such an extremity, we are affected by a physical shock, touched by the image at a distance, violated in the space of our own mental privacy' (1993: 137). I do not disagree with this; however, this thesis seeks to theorise these moments where distances between film and viewer are violated, subverted and obliterated.

though one were touching a film with one's eyes' (2000: xi). One image Marks repeatedly returns to throughout her book is a photograph of Shauna Beharry dressed in her mother's sari (*Seeing is Believing,* Shuana Beharry, 1991). Marks first describes the camera as 'caressing' the image, and then how she realises that she has been 'brushing the (image of the) fabric with the skin of my eyes, rather than looking at it' (xi, 127). This idea of the skin of the eyes brushing against the image is a particularly tactile analysis that provokes a sense of feeling in the reader and, thereby, partially recreates the way Marks's physicality was constructed by the film's mode of spectatorship. Marks's analysis is remarkably effective in capturing the sense of what was actually occurring in this particular moment of the film-viewer engagement. I similarly draw on this use of haptics in an attempt to describe the sensation of sound rather than image. For Marks, the image of the sari creates memories that are conveyed through the sense of touch. In the same way, sounds – such as lapping water, or grating, hoarse breathing – can generate memories that recall us to our embodied existence (for example, the feel of water, or the pain of a sore throat); yet they also have a texture that can best be described as rubbing against and, at times, aggravating the skin. Through a detailed consideration of the use of sound in certain mutilation films, I will consider the notion of haptic aurality, as well as haptic visuality.

So why do I refer to the physicality of the viewer in an attempt to articulate the blurring of a filmic construction and concrete body, rather than notions of the embodied spectator as explored by Sobchack and Marks?[11] Engaging with a

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[11] In the *Address of the Eye,* Sobchack elaborates on how existential phenomenology, as both philosophy and method of film analysis, recovers the film's body by acknowledging it as a 'subject of

language that enables us to both complicate, and yet retain, notions of viewer and spectatorship, allows for an interrogation into the physical responses mutilation films generate. Whereas structuralist approaches to cinema thought about film as a self-contained text, subsequent studies of spectatorship attempted to inject into this a dimension of subjectivity. However, critiques of spectatorship theories often focus on the confusion this creates regarding what is meant by 'spectator', and what constitutes the seemingly elusive spectator's engagement with the notion of a 'flesh-and-blood' viewer; this theoretical problem is not explicitly approached in the work of Marks and Sobchack.[12] For example, in *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics,* Robert Stam, Robert Burgoyne and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis argue that the spectator is an 'artificial construct produced by the cinematic apparatus' (1992: 147). So the positioning and movement of the camera, editing patterns, narrative progression, structures of identification, mise-en-scène and sound all constitute a particular position that is termed spectator. However, in his book *Moving Viewers,* a cognitive study into emotions, affects and American film audiences, Carl Plantinga observes that Stam et al allow this textual construct regressive states and belief systems, which would infer what Stam et al call the 'actual spectator' rather than the spectator-as-construct; in other words, the flesh and blood viewer (2000: 231).[13] This confusion

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vision', not merely an 'object for vision', and allows us to consider the spectator's body as 'uniquely situated and intentionally active in the process and production of cinematic vision' (1992: 304). In *The Skin of the Film,* Marks explores ranges of 'sense experience' in cinema, and suggests a 'valid critique of phenomenology is that it mistakenly believes that all of experience is accessible to consciousness' (2000: 152). As well as the 'cinematic encounter' taking place between the body of the film and the body of the viewer, it also takes place in 'my sensorium and the film's sensorium' (2000: 153). In this way, both Sobchack and Marks explore notions of embodied spectatorship, rather than positing a concrete theory and/or definition of what 'it' is. I hope to continue this fluid, exploratory approach to thinking about the body in the film-viewing experience; however, this project is also concerned with the interrogation of what is meant when terms 'spectator' and 'viewer' are used in analysis.

[12] Nor is it approached in other works that seek to articulate modes of embodiment in film-viewing; for example, Shaviro (1993), Powell (2005) and Jennifer Barker, who draws on Sobchack and phenomenology in her book, *The Tactile Eye* (2009).

[13] In *Unthinking Eurocentrism* (1994), however, Stam, with Ella Shohat, complicate notions of spectatorship that Plantinga critiques. They list five ways in which the spectator should be considered

leads Plantinga to propose, with an assumption that the 'spectator' and 'flesh-and-blood viewer' are entirely separable notions (an assumption that Stam et al, I suggest, avoid), to use spectator, viewer and audience interchangeably, and to only use the terms 'textual positions' and 'roles' when referring to filmic constructions.

The proposition to dispense with the notion of spectator as a textual construct, and use only 'position' and/or 'role' to refer to this concept, erodes the engagement between film and viewer that spectatorship theory has attempted to articulate. Films such as *Irréversible, Dans Ma Peau, Saw* and *Hostel* push against the dichotomy of film-as-object/viewer-as-subject. The textual analyses and chapters of this thesis begin at the surface of both the viewer and, metaphorically, the film, as I consider how the skin of the film (the image) pushes against the skin of the viewer. By arguing that sound has the potential for creating a more penetrating and invasive engagement, I then examine how the mutilation film disrupts notions of interiority/exteriority by generating affect that becomes detached from the text. Finally, I suggest that certain mutilation films redraw this boundary, allowing for a return to a relatively distanced spectatorship that may be defined as 'ocular-specular'.[14]

(fashioned by text, technical apparatus and institutional contexts, constituted by discourses and ideology, and embodied, raced, gendered and historically situated) and that, significantly, film analysis must explore the tensions that arise between these levels. This is indicative of a far more interrogative approach to spectatorship theory than a distinction between spectator-as-construct and 'actual spectator' that this thesis also aspires to.

[14] With this structure, this thesis partially resembles the arrangement of Barker's book *The Tactile Eye,* a phenomenological study – strongly influenced by Sobchack – that argues the notion of touch in the film-viewer engagement is not merely skin deep, rather it encompasses the entirety of the body, from its surface to its deepest recesses; 'cinematic tactility occurs not only at the skin or the screen, but traverses all the organs of the spectator's body' (2009: 2). Accordingly, she orders her chapters so as to begin 'at the surface' (eye contact) and move through 'three regions – skin, musculature, viscera – to end with a kind of immersion and inspiration that traverses all three at once' (2009: 2). However, whereas Barker articulates this engagement through the meeting of the lived-body of both the film

In Chapter One, 'Embodied Voyeurism', I focus on a particular group of horror films concerned with the optical detail of the mutilation of the human body. The films analysed in this chapter (*Hostel, Saw II – 3D*) fall under the critical category 'torture porn' which was, I suggest, kick-started by James Wan's *Saw* (2004), in spite of significant aesthetic differences between this original film and the sequels it spawned, and films it influenced.[15] In this chapter, I consider a particular image that captures the body in the moment of mutilation; I also distinguish a sequence of narrative that is, I argue, prevalent in films that are composed around scenes of torture. I identify three stages to this narrative sequence: when the torture about to transpire is realised by both victim and spectator, and consequently anticipated; the mutilation, where the body is attacked in a variety of ways; and the aftermath, namely blood, pus, bones, brains and viscera. In the first chapter, I focus specifically on the first two stages to ask how, and in what way, do these films generate physical responses in the viewer, and how do these responses complicate the notion of spectator and viewer? How do the stages of assault constitute shifts in the modes of spectatorship, and how can these viewing positions be understood in relation to notions of embodiment, voyeurism, sadism and masochism?

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and viewer – a phenomenological concept that argues for the reversibility of the film-viewer engagement through a paralleling of body parts defined by their expressive and perceptive functions – my analyses do not configure the film and viewer as two separate bodies engaged through a paralleling of body-parts. Rather, I suggest that the mutilation film places the viewer at the intersection of a textual construction and the body in front of the screen through various modes of physical spectatorship. This distinction necessitates an interrogation into the concepts of viewer and spectator that Barker uses interchangeably.

[15] Contemporary films with a focus on the mutilated human body are often influenced by the capture and torture narrative seen in James Wan's film, which in turn draws on both the aesthetics and narrative trajectory of David Fincher's *Se7en* (1995) . These films include the *Hostel* series, *Captivity,* and *Srpski Film* (Srdjan Spasojevic, 2009).

Continuing an exploration of films that delight in the visual detail of bodily disfigurement, Chapter Two, 'Mutilation as Spectacle', interrogates the third stage of the assault narrative sequence by looking at the aftermath of mutilation that is presented, I argue, either in movement or in stasis. These images come after the apex of torture, and constitute a further shift in the modes of spectatorship constructed by particular mutilation films. I ask: how can thinking about the aftermath of mutilation in relation to movement and stasis allow for a better understanding of how the assault narrative sequence destabilises and, potentially, redraws the boundaries between viewer and spectator? In what way does the spectacle of these images relate to notions of subject and object in the mutilation film?

Chapter Three, 'Affective Sounds', moves focus from visuality to aurality by exploring the extent to which a film's soundtrack constructs modes of physical spectatorship independent from, and not subservient to, the image. With a close textual analysis of *Dans Ma Peau*, I interrogate how, and in what ways, representations of self-harm interrogate and blur the distinction and definitions of viewer and spectator. By drawing on Elizabeth Cowie's work on anxiety and the horror film, and engaging with Marks's work on haptics, I explore how sound may be perceived through the sense of touch. In this chapter I ask: how might sound be considered in relation to theories of affect? How can sound be thought of as having physicality? Does sound threaten the fragile instability of film spectatorship (and in what ways does it do this)?

In Chapter Four, 'Extreme Frequencies', I continue to consider the ways sound generates physical responses to the mutilation film. Instead of focusing on sound that signifies a particular object within the diegesis (i.e. mutilation and self-harm), I explore the use of low and high frequencies that are not directly connected to any particular image or act. With close textual analyses of *Irréversible* and *À l'intérieur*, I examine how both high and low frequencies push at the limits of perception and form structures of identification. I draw on a theory of affect that suggests certain sounds can generate sensations before, or without, being cognitively processed, and research into sensory hearing impairment that argues ears can seem to create, as well as perceive, noise. My questions for this chapter are: how does sound create structures of identification? In what ways does this problematise theoretical concepts of viewer and spectator? How does an analysis of a film's soundscape complicate theories concerning media representations of sexual violence? Do extreme frequencies subvert notions of biology and technology, viewer and film?

Chapter Five, 'The Gut', emphasises the potential for mutilation films to induce nausea and the fear of vomiting and/or desire to vomit. With a focus on these particular sensations and bodily functions, I attempt to bring light to an aspect of corporeality often neglected in film studies. Through close textual analyses of *The Human Centipede: First Sequence* and *The Human Centipede: Full Sequence*, I explore how sound and image signifies and locates the gut on the screen in the body of the viewer. By acknowledging the self-reflexivity of these films, I question the extent to which notions of the viewer are strained against the concept of spectator as textual construction. Through a comparison of the distinct aesthetics of these two films, I examine how different representations of faeces generate intense physical

responses. I also ask: how can these films' modes of spectatorship be theorised, and in what ways do nausea and vomit destabilise or reaffirm notions of viewer and spectator, and biology and technology?

At the heart of this thesis lies a fascination in the ways the mutilation film engages with the body to make us, as viewers, cringe, grip the arms of our chairs and retch with revulsion. As such, these films and my analyses relate to a dilemma philosophers and film scholars have long attempted to resolve: why the mutilation film? A significant amount of work has been dedicated to asking 'why horror?'[16] and, with anxiety being a dominant mode of physical response, these previous studies could provide a benchmark from which to begin the exploration into the pleasures of the mutilation film. Although previous approaches to this query have often worked from within specific theoretical approaches, I would not consider it advisable or possible to attempt a theory of pleasure of the mutilation film that is

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[16] See, for example, *Dreadful Pleasures* (1985) where James Twitchell argues that horror films provide moral lessons for adolescents; Tania Modleski explores the pleasures of terror in relation to postmodern theory and 1980s contemporary horror (1986); Noël Carroll in *Philosophy of Horror* (1990), takes a cognitive approach, suggesting that fascination outweighs what he defines as the emotion of 'art-horror'; Gary Hoppenstand (1996) argues in 'The pleasures of evil' that, by portraying evil in hedonistic terms, the horror film is critical of a narcissistic society; popular film critic Mark Kermode argues in 'I was a teenage horror fan' (1997), that pleasure is derived from a fan's 'knowingness' of the horror film; Brigid Cherry in 'Refusing to Refuse to Look' (1999), takes an audience reception study approach and suggests that the horror film provides rituals of resistance for the female horror spectator; Yvonne Leffler studies the extent to which the aesthetics of horror may be considered pleasurable (*Horror as Pleasure,* 2000); Andrew Tudor's article 'Why Horror?' (2004), takes a critical approach to the question itself, arguing that it spawns further queries such as, what is it about people who like horror, and what is it about horror that people like?; Dennis Gile's article 'Conditions of Pleasure' (2004), considers how 'bad' film experiences can become 'good' ones; Matt Hills's book, *Pleasure of Horror* (2005) provides an overview of the approaches to pleasures of horror and argues that there has been a tendency to put theory first and pleasure second, and thus attempts to take a performative view of pleasure; and Plantinga, (2009), suggests that negative emotions are transformed into positive ones.

unified by any one particular framework.[17] Arguably, the notion of pleasure becomes even more problematic when discussed in relation to anxiety, as the two terms together appear to create a paradox that may possibly be unravelled by a turn to theories of sadism and masochism.

As I outlined earlier, sadism is the over-arching critical orientation towards the mutilation film for many critics and reviewers. The fact that audiences are willing to pay to view an abundance of torture, violence and rape, suggests that a certain degree of pleasure may be derived from seeing others suffer. However, a key research question for this thesis (that extends across all chapters) is how the mutilation film generates physical responses such as anxiety, thus pointing towards the idea that pleasure is also drawn from the viewer's own suffering. Masochism and spectatorship has been considered in relation to the horror film by Carol Clover, in her book *Men Women and Chainsaws* (1992), where she argues that the male spectator is constructed through identifications with the (androgenised) female protagonist, and he, consequently, takes a masochistic pleasure in her plight. A masochistic approach to spectatorship attempts to complicate the gender divide. In her study of the masochist aesthetic, *In the Realm of Pleasure*, Gaylyn Studlar argues that a masochistic theory of spectatorship 'confronts some of the assumptions grounding the theories that polarize male and female spectatorial experience' (1988: 35). The masochist aesthetic, she suggests, satisfies the drives to be both sexes, while also cutting across the dichotomy of pleasure/displeasure, thereby apparently solving what appeared to be a problematic paradox.

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[17] As Plantinga argues, there can be no one unifying theory of pleasure of cinema (2009: 20). I would extend this to suggest that there cannot (or should not) be one unifying theory of pleasure for one genre or group of films, for any one individual film, or even for any one individual viewer.

Notions of pleasure/unpleasure are not the only approach to the appeal of the mutilation film. In her study on the aesthetics of disgust, *Savoring Disgust*,[18] Carolyn Korsmeyer suggests that pleasure encompasses 'fascination and curiosity, emotional engagement, rapture, or just plain old enjoyment' (2011: 188), and, to bring all these aspects together, a common denominator may be found in the level of attention that responses such as disgust and anxiety afford. For Korsmeyer, a person taking pleasure in something means 'that one is occupied with a singular keenness and ardor' (118). Perhaps then, she suggests, we should consider disgust not in relation to pleasure/unpleasure but as a 'modifier of attention, intensifying for a host of reasons some experience that the participant would rather have continue than not' (118). I would like to consider this idea in relation to the mutilation film and ask *how* these films intensify *what* experience and for what reasons?

What is intensified by the mutilation film? In her article on *Hostel II*, and 'torture porn' in general, Gabrielle Murray argues;

> What the cinema mostly does, and one of the main reasons we continue
> to engage with its content, is that it *affects* us — it makes us feel ....
> When I was in the cinema watching *Hostel II*, I felt like I was brought
> back to my senses (2008).

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[18] Disgust is, of course, an emotion or affect that is particularly relevant to the modes of physical spectatorship constructed by the mutilation film. Further work considering how this is generated and how it creates physical responses, similar to this thesis's approach with a dominant concern on anxiety, would be particularly interesting.

In this quote, Murray refers to all cinema, not just *Hostel II* and other examples of torture porn. The responses examined, analysed and theorised throughout this thesis, therefore, are potentially not unique to the mutilation film in kind, only in concentration and intensity. Where *Hostel II* differs for Murray, it seems, is the specificity of affect – no longer is film generally and vaguely making her feel, she is now in a heightened sense of awareness of her senses. Murray connects these senses to a bodily presence, as she claims 'intense violent action can bring us face to face with corporeality' (2008). This particular engagement is, I suggest, one defining factor of the mutilation film; the physical responses these films generate serve to intensify notions of embodiment.

If the mutilation film intensifies an awareness of an embodied mode of existence (how this is done is a key research question that will be explored throughout this thesis), what are the reasons that lead the viewer to want this to continue? There are a number of ways this question may be approached, most of which are questionable due to the tendency of presenting an over-arching theory of a particular culture or society. For example, Murray references Eli Roth, (director of *Hostel* and *Hostel II*), who relates the proliferation of a contemporary visceral aesthetic to recent events such as 11 September 2001 attacks and the resulting 'terror alert orange'. Roth claims that people want to be as shocked by the films they see as they are by day to day life; simply, they want something to scream at. This fairly simplistic account does not quite ring true, particularly when one considers there are more ways to make an audience scream with shock (if that is, indeed, what they do while viewing a mutilation film, which is in itself contestable) than through the generation of intense physical responses. Further, it does not explain the contemporary

proliferation of these films; recent generations are not the first to have tragic events occur in their lifetime. Nor does it explain why mutilation films are not as lucrative and popular in countries far more war-torn than America (or why they also emerge from countries other than America). Murray arrives at a similar conclusion, by suggesting she does not see any particular correlation between these films and 'contemporary political events';

> But that is not to say that young audiences who feel disengaged, anxious and hopeless do not seek out these films. I think they do, but for the same reasons they have always sought alternative and explicit films out. My sense is these audiences want to feel intensity and fear. Fear that brings you into the moment, back to the body, to the senses, allows this sense of immediacy and intensity (2008).

Murray is suggesting a number of things here: first, that the mutilation film is predominantly viewed by young audiences, second that these audiences are in a prior state of anxiety, disengagement and hopelessness that, thirdly, leads to a desire to feel intensity and fear that ultimately involves being 'brought back' to a sense of embodiment. There is no evidence posited in this article to determine the ages of the mutilation film's (or, for Murray, torture porn's) audiences, and it should not be assumed that the viewers of mutilation films are young teenagers. Further, with the current popularity of downloading and legitimate online film rentals, this would be a particularly hard statistic to determine; however, perhaps it is not the most pertinent point being raised here. Particularly interesting is the idea that audiences are in some way disengaged, and that the mutilation film provides a modicum of relief for this.

Why would a viewer want to be 'brought back to the moment', and how can this question help form an understanding of the contemporary proliferation of the mutilation film? In his article 'All Stripped Down', Dean Lockwood posits two ideas regarding torture porn (generally, the mainstream examples of the mutilation film): first, that they are an allegory of control and, second, that they are an allegory of becoming. Lockwood draws on Deleuze's notion of the 'monster of control', which refers to a shift from a Foucauldian carceral society 'to a new "control society"' (2009: 45), and supports it with references to electronic tagging, swipe card access, and credit card use. This 'monster of control', Lockwood suggests, has also manifested itself in forms of entertainment (*Big Brother,* for example), and he notes how some narratives present similar environments (such as the house in which the protagonist, Jennifer, is held captive in *Captivity*), or the way characters directly reference reality television in dialogue (for example, in *Saw*). The difficulty with this idea is that it necessitates a large amount of hand-picking examples (it certainly does not extend to the majority of mutilation films to include those originating in Europe, and it would be a stretch to relate the argument to *all* mainstream examples), and that it ignores the debt these films pay to the horror genre, including their strong tendency towards reflexivity. Therefore, these similarities that may be found between certain mutilation films and current forms of entertainment – that may or may not be symptoms of a contemporary control society – have less to do with symbolising or representing the Deleuzian 'monster of control', and more to do with the self-consciousness of certain styles and genres of film.

The second theory Lockwood considers – that torture porn is an allegory of becoming – draws on the idea that the victims of these films are closed off 'to the

affective and intensive potential of life' (46) before going through a transformation defined by torture, fear and pain. By equating the viewer with the victim's trajectory ('[a]s the player, so the spectator'), Lockwood argues that such films 'amplify horror's potential to shake us out of our subjective security' (46). To elaborate on this 'potential' of torture porn, Lockwood draws on Steven Shaviro's observation, that 'the image disrupts the dualism of subject and object, the constitutive distance we require to establish phenomena (and "read" them) as objects and ourselves as active subjects' (46). Therefore, Shaviro argues, scopophilia is *not* mastery over the image but 'a forced, ecstatic abjection before the image' (1993: 49), which Lockwood states is a transformative experience (2009: 46).[19] I aim to build on this idea throughout this thesis by asking, how do physical responses generated by the mutilation film relate to notions of subjective security and/or insecurity?

Finally, I have not put a time constraint on the mutilation film. From the mutilation films mentioned throughout this thesis, the earliest was released in 1998, and the most recent in 2012; however, I would not suggest that they are isolated to this period. The reason it is so difficult to pinpoint 'where it all began' and when it ends (if it has or is in the process of doing so) is because what constitutes a mutilation film is a particular aesthetic that can be found across film history, genres and contexts. The significance of the mutilation film is the dominance of this aesthetic, where the sight and sound of mutilation constitute the corporeality of the viewer, and thus complicate key concepts in spectatorship theory. Only with the emergence of

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[19] However, Shaviro is not referring to the mutilation or torture image specifically; he is critiquing ideas relating to the way film structures ways of looking to introduce his study that attempts to locate the 'personal' in film analysis. Although this does include sections on violent images (in David Cronenberg's body horror and George A. Romero's zombie films) he also considers comedy and the art of Andy Warhol.

films presenting an intensive concentration of such visceral engagements has it become strikingly clear that such concepts necessitate further interrogation.

Chapter One: Embodied Voyeurism

The disembodied eye was celebrated as a strong illusion of power and omnipotence. One tends to forget that the voyeurism which was to become such an abiding preoccupation for film theory depends on forms of disembodiment, especially the idea of not having to take responsibility for one's bodily presence in a given space or at a given time (Elsaesser and Hagener, 2010).

This chapter is concerned with those films that delight in the optical detail of bursting blood vessels, oozing sores and splintering bones. Certain films that will be examined in this thesis, although they undoubtedly share a preoccupation with the destruction of human flesh, either avoid showing the process (or aftermath) of mutilation to any significant degree, and/or undermine the visual dominance of cinema through certain sound and editing techniques.[20] In other words, they 'tell' rather than 'show' the destruction of the body. I use the terms 'show' and 'tell' following Philip Brophy's classic study of the texture of 1980s horror films, 'Horrality' (1986),[21] where he compares the first two versions of *The Thing*: Howard Hawks' (1951) and John Carpenter's (1982). Brophy argues that; '[b]oth films deal with the notion of an alien purely as a biological life force, whose blind motivation for survival is its only existence' (10). However, as Carpenter's film shows bodily destruction in a way that Hawks' film only alludes to, the 1982 version of *The Thing*

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[20] See Chapter Three: Affective Sounds, Chapter Four: Extreme Frequencies, and Chapter Five: The Gut for discussions on mutilation films that omit the visual detail of mutilation.

[21] This article was published in *Screen* in 1986, however Brophy opens the article by stating he wrote it in mid-1983.

'generates a different mode of suspense' (10). My turn to contemporary horror films in this chapter explores a 'different mode of suspense' by questioning how the showing of bodily mutilation constructs physicality.[22] The focus on the visual detail of fleshy disfigurement constructs a mode of spectatorship that complicates the distinction between spectator and viewer. This chapter asks: how is physicality constructed via the visualisation of mutilation, and how should this be defined and theorised?

In 2004, James Wan and Leigh Whannell co-wrote a film which kick-started one of the most profitable horror film franchises to date, and arguably changed the texture of horror cinema by influencing the sub-genre that became known as 'torture porn.' This film was *Saw,* and its distributors' marketing strategy was to send severed hand prosthetics to journalists.[23] These gruesome props pointed to one scene towards the film's end for which the entire feature became known, where one of the lead protagonists cuts off his own foot *(see fig. 1.1).* The rest of the film is a concentrated

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[22] In 'Vile Bodies and Bad Medicine,' (1986), Pete Boss followed Brophy by claiming that the 'uncompromised or privileged detail of human carnage' is of central importance to contemporary horror (15-16). In *Recreational Terror* (1997), Isabel Cristina Pinedo draws on both Brophy and Boss to argue that contemporary horror cinema contains elements of the postmodern (for her approach to postmodernism see Pinedo, 1997: 10-14); one of these elements is the forceful approach to violence that privileges showing over telling. In '*The Haunting* and the Power of Suggestion,' (2000), Pam Keesey compares the 1999 release of *The Haunting* (Jan de Bont) with Robert Wise's 1963 original of the same name, arguing that the remake failed to 'deliver the goods' precisely because of the tendency to sidestep the power of suggestion and, instead, explicitly show the film's monsters (305-315). However, the technical choice of showing over telling is not solely a contemporary phenomena. In 'A Bloody New Wave,' (1964), Jean-Claude Romer wrote a short article on what he considered a new trend of bloody images in films emerging from the United States, referencing *The Horror of Party Beach* and *The Curse of the Living Corpse* (both Del Tenney, 1964), and the films of Herschell Gordon Lewis, commenting on the prominent appearance of blood (63-65). Further, in his book published in 2004, *The Horror Film,* Stephen Prince argues that the trend of 'the mechanics of violent death and graphic mutilation' began in 1967-1968 'when the last vestiges of the old Production Code were scrapped' (243, 242). The contemporary horror films considered in this chapter and the next may be distinguished from films cited by Brophy, Boss, Pinedo, Keesey, Romer and Prince, however, through the visceral engagement that the showing of bodily mutilation generates.
[23] See Lloyd Grove's article for *New York Daily News*, 'Lion's Gate Sends Severed Hands to Journalists to Promote *Saw,*' (2004) where he describes receiving a severed hand in a Ziploc bag.

mix of mystery and suspense akin to that of the Hitchcockian suspense thriller and David Fincher's *Se7en* (1995). However, the one shot (out of 2152 in total[24]) of a hacksaw cutting its way through a man's ankle – which has the duration of only 2 seconds – refreshed a cinematic fascination with blood and viscera, and became the foundation on which the subsequent films were based.[25]
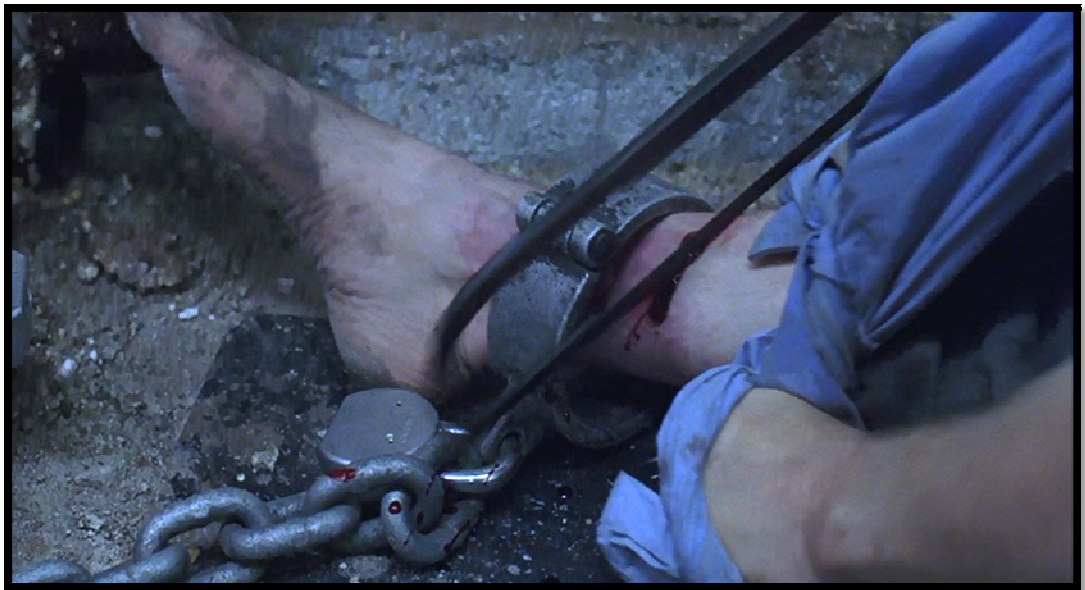
Figure 1.1: *Saw***: The shot of a foot being sawn off, lasting a total of two seconds, launched an entire sub-genre of contemporary horror critically known as 'torture porn'.**

Prior to contemporary horror, a concentrated proliferation of films that show the process/aftermath of bodily mutilation was apparent through the late 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Generally B-movie and cult status, the films of George A. Romero,

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[24] According to the cinemetrics database cinemtrics.lv:
http://www.cinemetrics.lv/movie.php?movie_ID=10939 Last accessed 07.03.2013.
[25] I say refreshed because, before the release of *Saw,* the horror film was in what film scholar Peter Hutchings, in his book *The Horror Film,* called an 'intriguing moment[] in genre cinema where there is no single dominant generic type or format'. Hutchings comments on a number of trends evident at the time of his writing in 2003: new digital technologies, the internet, Asian horror, British horror, continental European horror and the ghost story. Hutchings' book was published in 2004, immediately prior to the proliferation of what would become popularly known as torture porn, making one of his final comments particularly poignant; '[y]ears from now we might look back at this time and see patterns emerging that are not immediately apparent to us today' (216-217)

Herschell Gordon Lewis, Sam Raimi, and Italian zombie and cannibal movies, among others, all relished in showing various forms of evisceration.[26] The recent trend of showing such fleshy destruction differs from these previous films however: as well as now entering mainstream cinema, the spectatorship constructed is much more strongly tied to the victim of torture.[27] In his article 'All Stripped Down,' film scholar Dean Lockwood argues against the notion that 'what is new and distinctive about torture porn is the graphic and explicit nature of its violence' to suggest that 'the subgenre is actually more about the effectiveness with which the spectator is put into the victim's shoes' (2009: 44). Lockwood's study differs from mine in that he focuses on the narrative theme of capture and torture; as such, his article centres on what he terms 'the body suspended in the expectation of assault' (44). Although this assault almost always materialises, not all films with this now familiar narrative show the process/aftermath of mutilation, further strengthening Lockwood's argument. However, this avoids the fact that the most successful franchises – namely the *Saw* and *Hostel* series– for the most part do exhibit a fascination with the visual detail of maiming and dismemberment. Thus the mutilated body becomes the object of the gaze, and yet this chapter argues that, predominantly, *Saw* and *Hostel*'s spectator does not have power or omnipotence over this bloody image – the imperative of these films lies in perceiving one's own body. With a focus on both the

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[26] See Jay Slater's book *Eaten Alive! (*2006), for a comprehensive account of Italian exploitation filmmakers from the late 1970s to the early 1990s; Tony Williams, *The Cinema of George A. Romero* (2003), for an in-depth study of the cinema of George A. Romero; Herschell Gordon Lewis and Andrew Rausch, *The Godfather of Gore Speaks,* (2012), for fascinating accounts and anecdotes of Herschell Gordon Lewis' choices in film-making; and John Muir, *The Unseen Force,* (2004), for an exploration of the work of Sam Raimi.

[27] Referencing scenes of mutilation in *Catch-22* (Mike Nichols, 1970), *Deliverance* (1972, John Boorman), *Jaws* (Steven Spielberg, 1975), and *Rabid* (David Cronenberg, 1977) Boss writes; 'Often these scenes of carnage are presented in a privileged but wholly detached manner' and that we, as viewers, are free 'from interest in character …. It is her flesh which fascinates and appals us rather than the character's plight' (1986: 16). Through my analyses in this chapter I aim to show that, in contemporary horror, it is not possible to separate the character's fate from the fascination of their bodily ruination precisely because this mutilation is understood from the position of the victim rather than that of the detached voyeur.

'expectation of assault' and the display of assault, this chapter explores a spectatorship constituted through a 'body suspended' in the expectation of suffering, which climaxes with graphic and violent images.

The films I am concerned with in this chapter (*Hostel* (Eli Roth*, 2005), *Saw II* (Darren Lynn Bousman, 2005), *Saw III* (Darren Lynn Bousman, 2006), *Saw IV* (Darren Lynn Bousman, 2007), *Saw V* (David Hackl, 2008), *Saw VI* (Kevin Greutert, 2009), and *Saw 3D* (Kevin Greutert, 2010))[28] all have a very clear narrative structure I shall call the assault. The assault has three stages: anticipation, when what is about to transpire is realised by both victim and spectator and consequently anticipated; the mutilation, where the body is attacked in a variety of ways; and the aftermath, namely blood, pus, bones, brains and viscera. The mutilation and aftermath of the assault are shown through what I call the mutilating and mutilated wound-image. These two images need to be distinguished from each other, because one connotes the body that is deteriorat*ing*, and the other the body that is deteriorat*ed*. Whereas the mutilated wound-image is far more prolific, I argue that it is the mutilating wound-image that is iconic in the films considered here. The mutilating wound-image is the dominant reason the above films have been chosen for study; most of the features in the *Saw* and *Hostel* franchises are made up of more of these images than any other mutilation film. I argue that the mutilating wound-image creates a shift in the spectatorship these films construct; the nature and process of this shift is the concern of this chapter.

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[28] I do not include the original *Saw* in this chapter, as the mutilating wound-image is not prevalent in this film. It creates suspense in a similar way to its sequels (and many arguments I develop regarding the *Saw* sequels do apply to the original *Saw*); however, it does not often climax this suspense with graphic and explicit images. It is the shift between these two modes of spectatorship that this chapter wishes to explore.

The mutilating wound-image has many varied forms. It may present itself for a mere fraction of a second, or impose itself for much longer. It may consist solely of the flesh being mutilated, or it may include other visuals such as props and setting. They all, however, have one factor in common: they display the process of mutilation. Bones are not merely splinter*ed*; they are splinter*ing*. Limbs are not *already* dismembered; they are *being* dismembered. Thus, the mutilating wound-image disrupts the expectation of assault by satisfying its anticipation. At the same time, this image is elusive and deceptive. It is often confused with sound and editing; one may think it is there when, in actuality, it is nowhere to be seen. Controversy surrounds the mutilating wound-image; it is frequently deemed a lazy way to shock, with the common consensus being that better films are able to play tricks on the eyes with techniques mentioned above. However, this chapter argues that the mutilating wound-image allows for a very particular relationship between spectator and film that both speaks to, and begs a rethink of, existing theories of horror spectatorship.[29]

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[29] Theories of horror cinema have largely been divided roughly between psychoanalytical and cognitive. For psychoanalytical influenced theories of horror cinema, see Robin Stam's collection of articles which brings together his previous work on horror (in particular his famous 'Return of the Repressed' article that appeared in *Film Comment* in 1978) that argue horror monsters represent certain factions of society and culture that have been repressed through alienated labour and patriarchy (also see Mark Jancovich, who, in *Horror* (1992), criticises Wood's theory for ignoring the nuances of horror films and suggesting that the monster might equally represent the repressive (16); Carol Clover (*Men Women and Chainsaws,* 1992) where she argues for a masochistic male spectatorship in the slasher genre; Barbara Creed (*The Monstrous Feminine,* 1993) who explores abjection, feminism and the horror film; Linda Williams's article, 'When the Woman Looks' (1984), who argues that women identify with the monster through the gaze; and an edited collection of articles that think critically about the mobilisation of psychoanalytical frameworks in horror film analysis (*Freud's Worst Nightmare,* Steven Jay Schneider (ed.) (2004)). For cognitive theories of horror cinema, see James Twitchell's *Dreadful Pleasures,* who claims to find psychological explanations of the pleasures of horror more compelling than notions of repression, for example, the idea that 'horror art plays out the "do's" and "don'ts" of adolescent sexuality' (1985:65); Noel Carroll's famous cognitive study of horror and its pleasures (*Philosophy of Horror,* 1992); and Cynthia Freeland's rejection of psychoanalytic explanations of the pleasures of horror, instead arguing that the genre enables us to reflect philosophically on the nature and existence of evil (*Naked and the Undead,* 2002). Over the past two decades, Deleuzian approaches to horror have become more prominent, in particular, Stephen Shaviro's chapter on David Cronenberg in his 1993

Before going on to an analysis of *Hostel* and *Saw II – 3D,* I would like to consider some of the theoretical problems these films present, particularly in relation to the quote that opened this chapter. The spectacle of the body is undeniably evident in these films; therefore, a quick and easy assumption would be that these images construct a voyeuristic spectatorship defined by distance, and an unacknowledged gaze that holds mastery over the object of the film. However, the physical responses that these films generate are in direct conflict with the premise that voyeurism is disembodied, and, as such, one does not acknowledge their own bodily presence. In her pioneering study of cinema and the film experience, *The Address of the Eye,* Vivian Sobchack identifies three presuppositions that inform the majority of film theory, the third being that 'film is a *viewed object*'. As a result, the idea that 'film, as it is experienced, might be engaged as something *more* than just an object of consciousness is a possibility that has not been entertained' (1992: 20). This chapter endeavours to argue that these films are certainly 'something more' than a viewed object; principally I aim to explore the way they confront the strict hierarchy of viewer as subject, and film as object and, in doing so, further complicate theories of film spectatorship.

As with any film that generates a physical response, *Hostel* and *Saw II – 3D* complicate the notion of spectator and viewer by grounding the latter in a concrete and hyper-awareness of their own physicality, presumably detached from the textual

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publication, *The Cinematic Body,* and Anna Powell's focused study on Deleuze and the horror film (2005) where she argues that psychoanalytical theories of horror neglect a study of the genre's aesthetics.

construction theorised as the film's spectatorship. In his re-reading of Christian Metz's theories of spectatorship, 'Cinema's Double', Richard Rushton explains that, to be a spectator, he is 'encouraged to forget the existence of [his] own self in its bodily form' (2002: 112). Rushton parts ways with Metz's theories when he argues that the spectator, rather than being 'filled up' by cinema, is instead *'emptied of all contents'* as they are 'unencumbered by the clumsiness … of [their] own bodies' (2002: 113). The disembodied notion of the spectator is, therefore, seemingly incompatible with *Hostel* and *Saw II – 3D*'s spectatorships. Rushton pre-empts a critique of the above theory by suggesting that such moments, where a sense of bodiliness is lost, are rare;

> And such moments are, quite literally, *gaps in the viewing experience,* they are moments of imaginary phantasmagoria, of unconscious perception, of a degree of hyper-perceptive hallucination where one unshakeably *believes* in the reality of the screen world in which one is engrossed (114).

Rushton argues that classical narrative cinema still aspires to these moments (115). In spite of the mutilation film's preoccupation with evoking corporeal sensations in the viewer (or, as I will go on to argue, *because* of this preoccupation), *Hostel* and *Saw II – 3D* aspire to the very same.[30]

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[30] I would go so far to suggest that it is the precise skill of articulating these 'gaps in the viewing experience' (Rushton, 2002: 114) that separates the more interesting and affective visually-focused mutilation film from the bland and the banal. It is the difference, for example, between the intense viewing experience of *Hostel,* and that of the frequently ridiculous (but still enjoyable) *Wrong Turn* series (Rob Schmidt, Joe Lynch, Declan O'Brien, 2003-2012).

A young man walks down a passageway lined with doors. Each door is made of clouded glass, through which clearly defined silhouettes of writhing bodies, in various sexual positions, are discernible. Bathed in soft blue/purple light, his facial expression betrays a wish to be anywhere but where he is *(see fig. 1.2)*. Rhythmic beats and soft moans on the soundtrack blend seamlessly with the satisfied murmurs emanating from behind the transparent doorways. He continues his journey to the end of the corridor where, tentatively, he pushes open the glass that separates him from what lies beyond. This time, there is no obscure shadow of a person; instead a live flesh and blood woman stands before him, inviting him in.

Figure 1.2: *Hostel*: **The stylisation of the brothel scene stands out from the rest of Hostel's cinematography, and acts as a metaphor for the spectatorship this film constructs.**

The above passage is a description of an early scene in *Hostel*. The film follows three young men, (Josh, Paxton and Oli), as they travel across Europe in search of good times, and, of course, women. One of these men, Josh, has been persuaded that the best way to get over his past relationship is to sleep with someone else. Standing

at the threshold of an array of sexual opportunities, Josh nervously observes the woman his friends have picked out for him – and leaves.

Hostel's brothel scene stands out from the rest of the film, and indeed all films looked at in this chapter, because it is so heavily stylised. A slow tracking shot that follows Josh reveals the perfect silhouettes of naked bodies moving in a graceful and carefully choreographed sexual dance. The blue/purple lighting, the spotless décor, and the room at the end of the corridor that promises unknown delights, all point to the fact that this is a meticulously designed set rather than a pre-existing brothel Josh has stumbled into.[31] By contrast, for the majority of the film (as it is for most of the *Saw* films) the cinematic apparatus are invisible, and thus give the illusion that what unfolds in front of the camera is a segment of a much larger reality. In their study of various modes of spectatorship, *Film Theory*, Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener argue that this latter spectatorship is the first of seven modes. This 'ocular-specular' mode (2010: 14), conceptualised as window and frame, is generally known as 'classical':

> Classical cinema keeps its disembodied spectators at arm's length while
> also drawing them in. It achieves its effects of transparency by the
> deployment of filmic means (montage, light, camera placement, scale,
> special effects) which justify their profuse presence by aiming at being
> noticed as little as possible (18).

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[31] In one of his DVD commentaries, Eli Roth explains that the set was built on a stage in Prague, but the actual design was based on a brothel in Tokyo.

Hostel's spectator,[32] for the most part, is closely tied into a fictional world, while remaining blind to the mechanics of securement. The early scene described above is both illustrative of, and contrasts with, this spectatorship. Unlike the brothel's stylised look and corridors of clouded glass, classical cinema is transparent, allowing a visual proximity without revealing what is being looked through (in this instance, window becomes metaphor for cinematic apparatus). Yet, just as Josh does not enter into a sexual encounter, this visuality fails to constitute physical engagement; he and the spectator of the first mode are kept at an arm's length. Thus Elsaesser and Hagener describe it as disembodied and voyeuristic. However, as Josh removes the opaque barrier between himself and what lies beyond, his presence is acknowledged. No longer a voyeur who has the luxury of observing a myriad of obscure sexual trysts, Josh is looked upon by the woman on the other side of the screen. Such acknowledgement arises between the spectator and the mutilating wound-image throughout *Hostel* and *Saw II – 3D*. Just as the woman who has been bought for Josh turns and looks at him, this chapter will explore how the mutilating wound-image returns the gaze, and, in doing so, subverts the dichotomy subject/object, complicates the notions of spectator and viewer, and constructs a visceral engagement.

The expectation stage of assault is the most prolonged in terms of film running time as it must shift the spectatorship from identification with the look of the camera to the position of the victim. It is the point where, as Lockwood states, the spectator is effectively 'put into the victim's shoes' (2009: 44). The spectatorship is constituted

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[32] I use the term spectator to refer to textual constructions; where these are complicated by notions of the viewer's body in front of the screen, I will explicitly interrogate the use of these terms.

through a sense of panic and rising anxiety in the character's situation. Although screams and pleads are an intrinsic factor in creating physicality during the expectation stage – and they are certainly indicative of the impending mutilation – other techniques are continually and repeatedly utilised to firmly bind the spectator/viewer to a position of anticipation. The use of point-of-view shots, revelation of the impending torture, and speed and strength of cuts, are explored in this section to question how this period constructs a spectatorship that will, ultimately, constitute the body of the viewer. The films (particularly those of the *Saw* franchise) also draw strongly on influences from Alfred Hitchcock's suspense thrillers, such as creating anticipation through objects of suspense, prolonging this anticipation through the suspension of time, and mise-en-abîme.[33] Indeed, as confessed by director James Wan, *Saw* (2004) was envisioned not as a 'gorey horror', but as a thriller *a la* Hitchcock.[34] This aspect of the first film was taken on by its sequels at the same time as the torture sequences were substantially multiplied. The combination of Hitchcockian suspense and B-movie gore[35] creates a uniquely disturbing contemporary horror of which *Saw II – 3D* and *Hostel* are primary examples.

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[33] See Deborah Linderman, 1991, for a discussion of Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) and mise-en-abîme. Linderman argues that, by orders of doubling, ('Judy is put into the textual space as Madeleine by Gavin Elster for Scottie' (1991: 57)), the text is mise-en-abîme. The complex plot of *Vertigo* sees an internal story placed within a 'larger diegetic pattern' (57). In this dynamic, with a focus 'on the textual system as a set of self-reflecting mirrors' (52) Linderman reads the film as a struggle against the collapse of sexual difference, thus building on the work of Robin Wood (1986) and Tanya Modleski (1988) who are both critical of the 'coercive force' of patriarchy (52).

[34] Executive producer for *Saw III*, Leigh Whannell (also writer of, and actor in, *Saw*) speaks of his influences, including Hitchcock, in the DVD commentary for this film.

[35] I follow Isabel Cristina Pinedo in my definition of gore; 'the explicit depiction of dismemberment, evisceration, putrefaction, and myriad other forms of boundary violations with copious amounts of blood' (1997: 18).

The first assault in *Hostel* does not occur until nearly halfway through the film's running time. Up until this point, the spectator's gaze has been folded with that of the camera, and the average shot length is only between 4 and 5 seconds long.[36] At the beginning of Josh's torture, however, the screen goes black, after which there is a 45 second long point-of-view shot. The shot stands out because it is significantly longer and very different in style to what has come previously, thus marking a change that will create a shift in the spectatorship from an identification with the camera to one with the victim. The black screen fades into a reveal of an unknown room. The mystery is heightened by the allowance of only a small amount being seen at any one time; all that is visible is a small circle off centre right. As the camera pans and tilts, this circle remains static within the frame, indicating that the spectator is in the position of a character that is blindfolded. The limited visuals transform this shot into a puzzle that must be pieced together by both victim and spectator/viewer *(see fig 1.3)*. The clues are dirty clamps, hammers, tongs and pokers, caged lights, a door, and leather goggles. On the foreground of the soundtrack, heavy breathing and whimpering pull the spectator more tightly into the position of the victim. The small circle that relieves the screen from total blackout focuses on the door as someone in a doctor's mask enters looking, directly at the camera/victim/spectator. As the gaze is returned, the fold of spectator into victim is complete *(see fig 1.4)*.

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[36] Before the first assault, the shortest shot is 0.5 seconds and the longest is 36 seconds. Beginning the assault with a 45 second long shot significantly marks a change in editing style. This change creates a shift in the spectatorship.
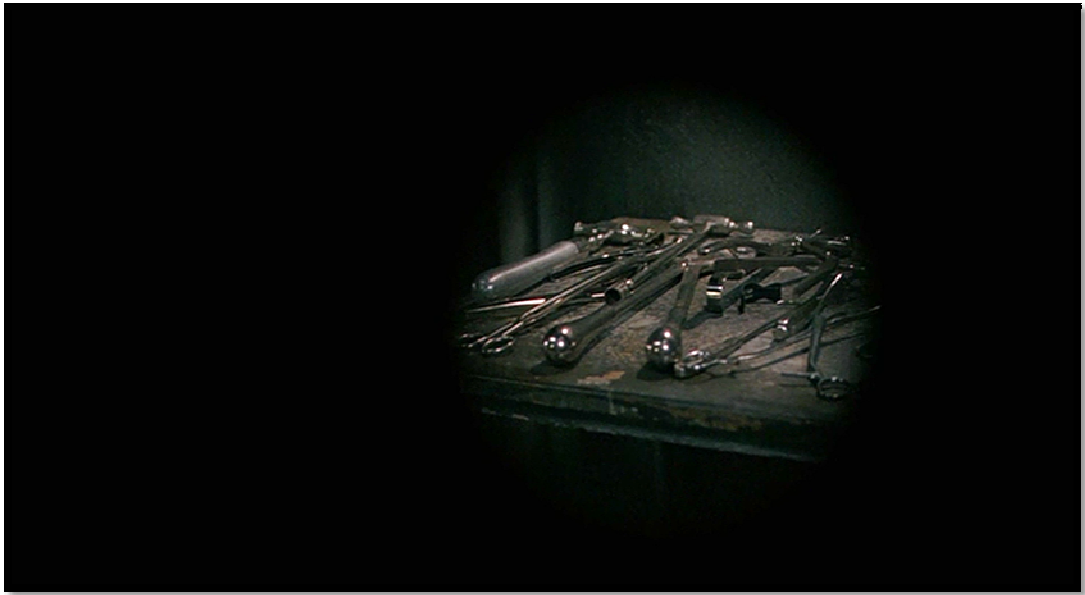
Figure 1.3: *Hostel*: **The limited visuals transform this shot into a puzzle that must be pieced together.**

Figure 1.4: *Hostel*: **The gaze is returned, and the fold of spectator into victim is complete.**

The use of a point-of-view shot to place the spectator into the position of the victim is usually coupled with the revelation (or lack thereof) of what is about to occur.

Josh's point-of-view shot leaves many questions to be asked as to where he is and what is about to happen. Similarly, the beginning shot of Paxton's assault, the second out of three in *Hostel,* is a 35 second long black screen. The foregrounding of his whimpers and cries tie the spectator to the victim's spatial position, at the same time as depriving both of any clues, visual or otherwise, of what is about to occur. The particular weapon of choice, or the function of the torturous device, is not revealed before the victim knows what is about to happen to them.[37] However, there is often a presence of objects revealed to the spectator and victim that anticipate impending torture. These may be familiar (tongs, drills and saws) and unfamiliar (elaborate-looking traps and devices) *(see fig 1.5).* In either case, the object embodies what is to come, even as it does not reveal the specific mode of torture.[38] In this way, the spectator is constructed via the victim's narrative trajectory. *Saw II – Saw 3D* emphasise and prolong the process of revelation with the aid of videos and cassette tapes on which the serial killer Jigsaw explains where the victim is, why they are there, and what is about to happen to them. Often there is a close-up, or medium close-up, of a television screen on which the infamous 'Billy' doll[39] dictates their fate. The television set frame mimics the frame of the film; the mise-en-abîme produces the spectator as victim *(see fig 1.6).*

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[37] Although in *Saw VI* and *Saw 3D* the reverse bear trap is used for the second and third time (the bear trap forces the victim's jaws apart, resulting in the head being ripped open horizontally) both second and third victim of this popular tool are already aware of what it will do. Their recognition of the trap creates, and is created by, the franchise's spectator.

[38] Charles Derry, in his book *The Suspense Thriller*, refers to Alfred Hitchcock's use of objects that stand 'not only for [themselves], but for something else' as a way to generate suspense (1988: 21). See also Andrew Sarris, *The American Cinema*, for a discussion on visual correlatives in Hitchcock's work (1996: 56-60).

[39] This is a doll created by James Wan for the first *Saw* chapter to allow the killer to anonymously announce himself to his quarry. It was one of the many elements that was picked up by subsequent directors and made ubiquitous throughout the 6 sequels.
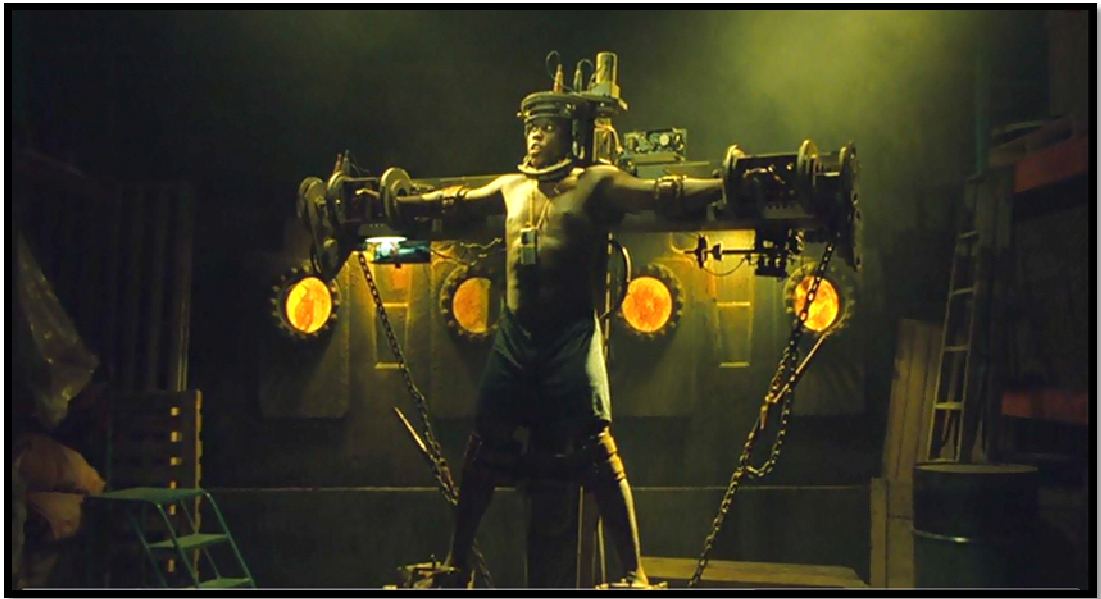
Figure 1.5: *Saw III*: **A particularly elaborate looking contraption.**

Figure 1.6: *Saw II*: **Mise-en-abîme - the frame of the television set mimics the frame of the film.**

Originally the term for the small shield within a coat of arms, the common usage for mise-en-abîme points to the practice of standing between two mirrors and seeing one's own reflection reproduced infinitely. It can also be used to label a technique

where an image contains a smaller copy of itself and the sequence of this appears to recur endlessly. French author and Nobel Prize winner André Gide engages with this concept to create 'distorted reflections' of himself in his characters.[40] For Deborah Linderman, writing on Hitchcock's *Vertigo,* mise-en-abîme is a construct that 'presupposes a set of embedded, mutually reflecting and interanimating structures into which the characters' "psychologies" are enfolded' (1991: 57). Repetition is a key factor in mise-en-abîme; in *Saw II – 3D*, the 'psychology' of the victim is enfolded into, not another character, but the position of the spectator. However, at the same time, the internal structures of the film are revealed. Mise-en-abîme is a self-reflexive technique that serves to destabilise the structure of the film and its spectator. As well as placing the spectator in the victim's shoes, the film within a film points to the inner workings of the text. The spectator is thus tied to the film at the same time as these ties are threatened.

Whether through point-of-view shots, or mise-en-abîme, or both, the process of revelation shifts the unknown horrors of the assault into anticipation of mutilation. For example, in *Saw IV,* Swat Commander Rigg – one of the only remaining survivors on the team set to capture Jigsaw – walks into his living room to find a woman he does not know bound to a chair that is elaborately kitted up with locks, cogs and gears. Until this mechanism begins to move, and the woman's hair is slowly wound into the machine, it is unclear what kind of mutilation is going to occur. At the point of unknown, anxiety and panic – composed through camera placements and editing – do not have a specific object of mutilation and, as such,

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[40] See Victoria Reid, *André Gide and Curiosity,* (2009), where she discusses how, through the use of mise-en-abîme, André Gide reveals his 'writerly curiosity' (219-247).

cannot be anticipated. The anticipation of mutilation signifies an end to the torture where the victim's body is relieved of suspension. In her article 'The Lived Nightmare', Elizabeth Cowie follows Freud's theory of pleasure by suggesting 'that pleasure, or satisfaction, is dependent on a previous unpleasure in order for a recognizable *change* in the state of the subject, or organism, to be experienced' (2003: 29). When the pleasure lies in the 'cessation of unpleasure' (29) the nature of the film's conclusion does not matter – 'whether horrible or happy' (29). The anticipated mutilation is, therefore, also desired as it promises the satisfaction of the cessation of unpleasure. As the woman's hair is pulled further and further, and the skin on her forehead begins to stretch, the anxiety finds its object in mutilation before it even occurs; the victim and spectator, who were both at once 'suspended in the expectation of assault' (Lockwood, 2010: 44), are from this point onwards promised a release *(see figs. 1.7 and 1.8).*
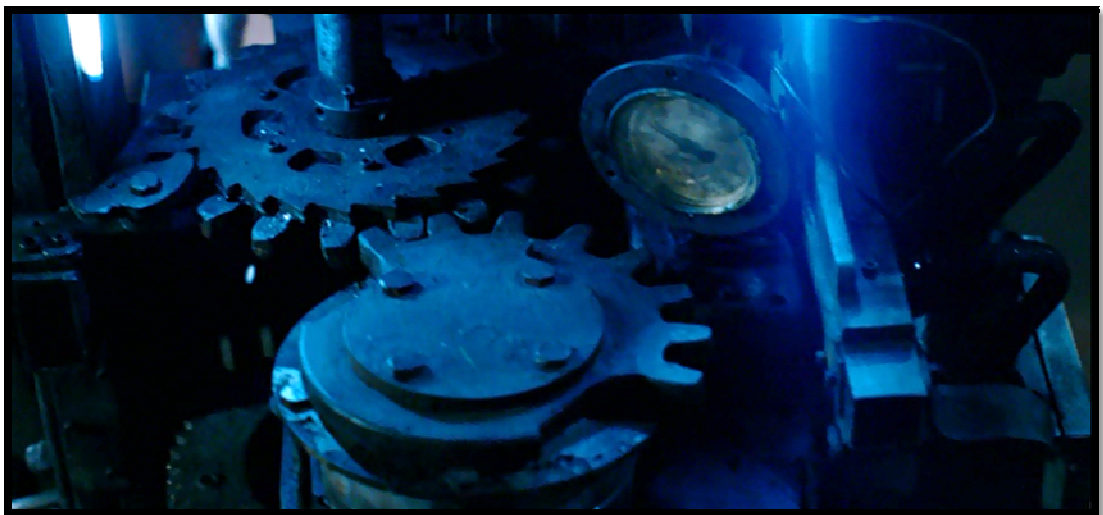
Figure 1.7: *Saw IV*: **A jumble of cogs and gears makes what is about to occur unclear, and therefore does not have a direct object of anxiety…**

Figure 1.8: ...until the purpose of the machine is revealed and specific mutilation is anticipated.

With the promise of release comes an intensified episode of suspense. Now the actual act of torture has been revealed, it is a waiting game until it finally occurs. More so than *Hostel, Saw II – 3D* capitalise on this period where time is suspended for both victim and spectator. In their collection of extended essays on the 'roman policier' (crime detective fiction), Pierre Boileau and Thomas Narcéjac ask the question of what is being suspended in these narratives. The answer is time (1964: 89-90). As film scholar, Charles Derry, elaborates on in his study of the suspense thriller;

> [d]uring those moments that suspense is operative, time seems to extend itself, and each second provides a kind of torture for a spectator who is anxious to have his or her anticipations foiled or fulfilled (1988: 32).

Once a victim has activated their trap, a timer begins, giving them a few seconds or minutes to complete their task. This could be cutting a key from behind their eye, ripping chains from various parts of their body, cutting away a large amount of flesh,

crushing their hands in vices, or any other number of gruesome activities.[41] Close-up shots on the timer reveal how much longer the victim/spectator must endure the anticipation of pain and/or death *(see figs. 1.9, 1.10, 1.11).* However, as the camera frequently cuts away from this device, there arises a possibility to manipulate this particular stage of suspense. For example, ten seconds within the world of the film does not correlate with ten seconds of the film's running time; as much as one minute may be suffered by the victim/spectator, whereas the on-screen clock suggests only half of this time has passed by. Time, therefore, *does* extend itself in these scenes, prolonging the torture of unfulfilled anticipation for both spectator and victim.

By folding the victim's and spectator's anticipation of assault, as well as the gaze, these particular mutilation films create an identification that exceeds the point-of-view perspective. Point-of-view shots are rarely dominant during the assault; other techniques are used to construct spectator- victim identification. *Saw II – Saw 3D* do not construct the spectator's position with point-of-view shots as intensely as *Hostel.* Instead, the emphasis is on camera placement and speed of editing which construct a sense of panic and anxiety. For example, the first assault in *Saw II*, the 'head trap' or 'venus fly trap',[42] begins with an apparent point-of-view shot as the victim looks around the room. Again, as with *Hostel*, the spectator is constituted as the victim

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[41] It should be noted that there is often someone else responsible for the victim's survival, as in *Saw III* where Jeff must undergo a certain amount of emotional and physical pain before the victim is released, or *Saw VI* where William Easton must act quickly, endure pain and/or make difficult decisions in order to save his employees. The countdown before at least one person must meet a grisly end is still prevalent in these examples.

[42] This is a sort of Iron Maiden solely for the head. It is a full mask that is capable of encasing the skull; it is split down the sides to open up, thus resembling a venus fly trap. The open mask is fastened to the victim's throat; both the front and back of the mask are lined with metal spikes. When the time runs out, the mask snaps together on its hinges, enclosing and crushing the victim's head.

pieces together what has happened and what is about to happen. However, in this scene, the ostensible point-of-view shot ends with the victim positioning a mirror and looking at himself *(see fig 1.12)*. His reflection does not return the gaze, thus revealing that the looks of the camera and victim are not as one. Here, the spectator is not in the position of the victim; the spectator's look is still with the camera but the camera was moving as if it were in the position of the victim. Through this mild deception, the camera represents the victim; this representation produces panic and anxiety.
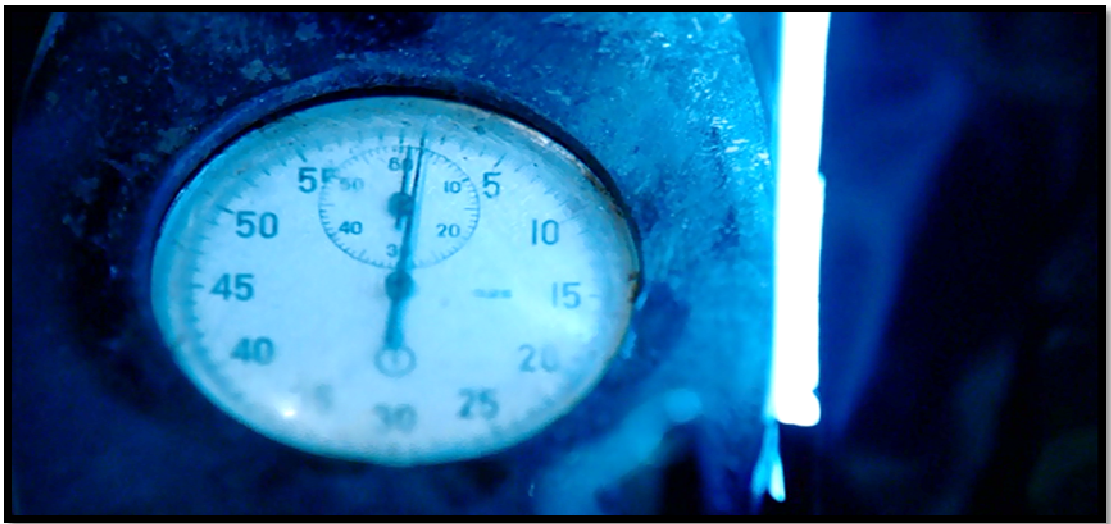
Figure 1.9: *Saw IV*: Timers feature heavily throughout the Saw series.
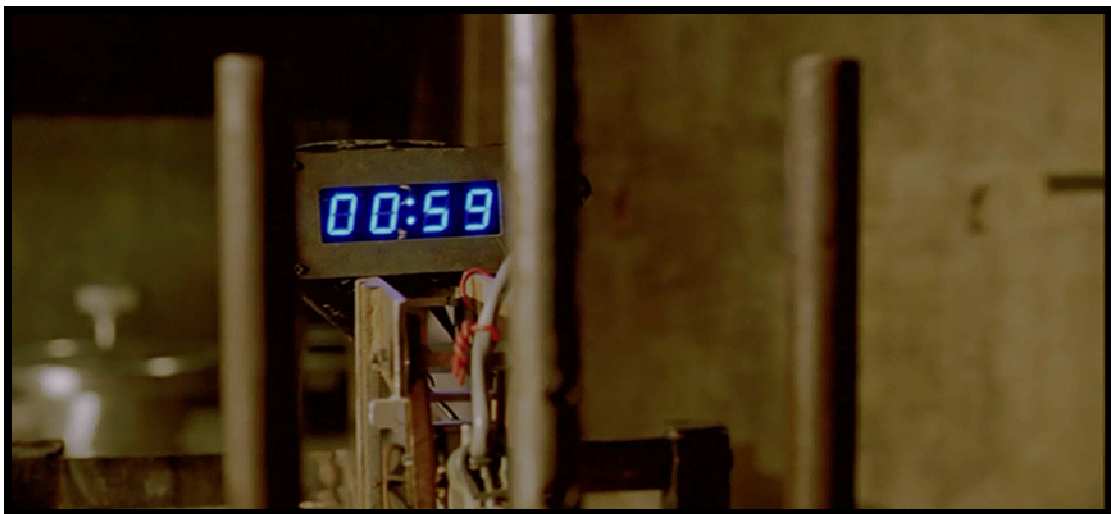
Figure 1.10: *Saw 3D.*

Figure 1.11: *Saw III*.
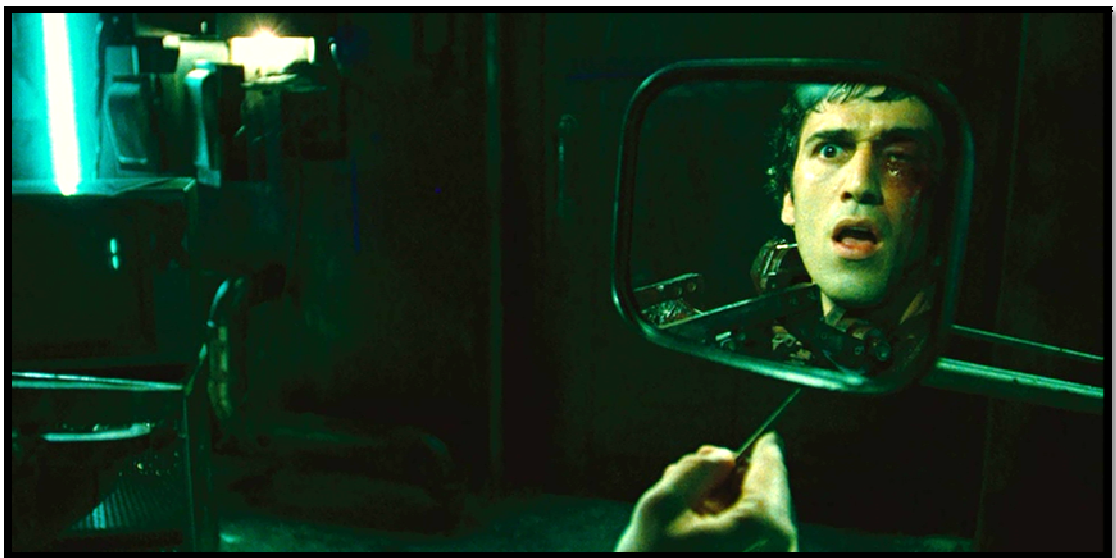
Figure 1.12: *Saw II*: The gaze is not returned, revealing the looks of the victim and camera are not as one.

There are over 69 victims[43] over the course of 7 *Saw* films; almost half of these are tightly restrained in some form before they are tortured and (usually) killed. Their restraints force them all into similar movements; as they struggle against whatever it is that traps them, they cannot move very far, hence their movements are short, fast

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[43] Due to instances where SWAT teams and groups of police are blown up and shot down, and it is not made clear how many died – nor is it clear how many were in the scene due to editing tricks used to capitalise on a small cast – it is not possible to say definitively how many fatalities occurred throughout the *Saw* series.

and erratic. With very fast jump cuts – multiple shots within one second of running time – the films generate movement by creating the illusion that the victim is moving even faster and more erratically. Thus, the camera itself displays anxiety and panic with this motion. This is a style known as 'MTV' editing where images are thrown out with the speed of a machine gun. This technique was used in the original *Saw* film, and then became part of the franchise's iconography through its proliferation in the sequels.[44] At the same time as the camera is moved by very small degrees, these shot changes are interspersed with much stronger cuts where the camera shifts from one side of the victim and back again. The sickening jolts of this editing style generate panic and anxiety because it is *mimetic* of the victim.

In her study of intercultural cinema, *The Skin of the Film*, Laura Marks observes that the term mimesis comes from the Greek word 'mimeisthai' (to imitate), thus suggesting that 'one represents a thing by acting like it' (2000: 138). By acting like a terrified victim, the camera represents panic and anxiety at the same time as creating it. The films become not an object of anxiety but a subject of anxiety via mimesis as it 'shifts the hierarchical relationship between subject and object … subjects take on the physical, material qualities of objects, while objects take on the perceptive and knowledgeable qualities of subjects' (141). At the same time, the movement is instructed by panic and anxiety i.e. the victim moves quickly and erratically within their restraints because they are scared, while this movement also generates these

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[44] In his commentary as executive producer for *Saw II,* James Wan explains that fast editing was necessary due to a small budget (although he does not elaborate on this, presumably it was used to hide or distract from potentially lower production values). However, the technique proved so effective, subsequent directors continued to make use of it even as their budgets increased significantly.

feelings. By representing panic through its movement, the camera composes a panicked and anxious spectatorship.

In her book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion,* Sara Ahmed argues that 'feelings do not reside in subjects or objects, but are produced as effects of circulation' (2004: 8) and that 'emotions shape the very surface of bodies, which take shape through the repetition of actions over time' (4). Panic and anxiety are not created by the object of the film that is distantly observed by the spectator, but by the body of the film from which the spectator arises; 'Mimesis is an immanent way of being in the world, whereby the subject comes into being not through abstraction from the world but compassionate involvement in it' (141). Similarly, and drawing on Marks, film theorist Martine Beugnet, in her book *Cinema and Sensation,* distinguishes between mimesis and the 'conventional conception of the observer/observed relation' in that for the latter the observed is separate (2007: 5). The camera movement pushes and pulls the spectator through the space of the film. As Sobchack states, and Marks paraphrases: the 'relationship between spectator and film is fundamentally mimetic, in that meaning is not solely communicated through signs but experienced in the body' (149). Through 'compassionate involvement' the spectator 'comes into being'.

Decontextualisation of violence also occurs through stasis. The movement of the camera, that jolts erratically, and swings dizzyingly around the victim, emphasises the static nature of the victim/spectator's suspense which (temporarily) halts the narrative and enhances the violence. Although the camera moves quickly, it cannot move very far; it is tied to the position of the victim in restraints. This is also evident

in *Hostel,* as the camera continually returns to the same close-up shots of Josh's hands and feet, and medium close-ups of his torso, head and shoulders. The implication is that, spatially, there is nowhere for the camera/victim/spectator to go. This is likewise true in terms of the narrative. In her book, *Recreational Terror,* Isabel Cristina Pinedo argues that horror film narratives are propelled forward through the use of violence. Any victim that is unable to use violence must lack narrative agency (1997: 74-75). This idea is further strengthened by the second torture sequence in *Hostel,* where Paxton is able to free himself once violence has been enacted upon himself and his torturer. He then embarks upon the chase that will create the climax of the film; along the way he manages to shoot, hit, run-over and cut a considerable number of people as he succeeds in his escape.[45] Similarly, once a victim of *Saw II – 3D* is able to enact violence upon themselves (or sometimes other people), they may be free of their trap and move forward in the narrative of the film. Until this occurs, the victim/spectator are in a position of stasis, faced by their own mutilation which *must* occur for the suspended narrative to resume.

Through a position of stasis, suspension in *Saw II – 3D* and *Hostel* is claustrophobic. Unlike many Hitchcock thrillers, which create suspense through chases,[46] the traps and torture rooms in the films looked at in this chapter are frequently small and/or enclosed. A chase that takes place in the open has the luxury of space, somewhere to escape to and the possibility of freedom. *Saw II – 3D* and *Hostel*'s victim/spectator is denied this.[47] Cross-cutting torture sequences with any other scene is rare; although

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[45] Until *Hostel: Part II,* of course (Eli Roth, 2007).
[46] See Derry, who relates this suspense to the thrill of the fast chase (1988: 23).
[47] The first trap in *Saw 3D* attempted to break away from this mould by setting it in a public shopping area, separated from wide open spaces only by glass. The sense of space that this location created

cross-cutting may create suspense by bringing two story-lines together, it generates a sense of space that dilutes the anticipation and process of violence and torture.[48] Claustrophobic suspense creates a lack of potential for the victim/spectator to escape mutilation, and therefore intensifies anxiety. In his article, 'Towards a Multiplicity of Voices' (2005), film scholar Will Higbee argues that when violence is decontexualised, it is enhanced. As his example, he refers to Gaspar Noé's *Irréversible* (2002), which has a non-linear narrative. This style exaggerates the violence already inherent in assault, murder and rape. Similarly, the traps and torture scenes present in the films looked at in this chapter are decontextualized, not because they are non-linear – although *Saw II – 3D* make frequent use of flashbacks – but because what occurs in them has little impact on the rest of the film's narrative. Each scene could be watched in isolation and understood, just as the violence of the scenes could be removed for the film to be comprehensive. They are self-contained scenarios; the actual act of torture – pulling out teeth, ripping out ribcages, drowning in pig guts – have little to no bearing on the rest of the film. Although this brings with it the danger of being declared gratuitous, I argue that, by decontextualizing the mutilation, the anxiety it constructs is strengthened, thereby creating disturbing and viscerally engaging mutilation films.

The speed and style of editing not only construct anxiety and panic on the level of mimesis and claustrophobia, but also by threatening the connection between spectator and film. In *Hostel* and *Saw II – 3D,* the majority of the editing style

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weakened the anticipation of violence and impact of mutilation. Thankfully, the film-makers chose not to repeat this style throughout the rest of the film.

[48] One main exception that springs to mind is the foot severing scene in *Saw* (2004) as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. Another exception is the chain trap in *Saw III*. Also, the climaxes of the *Saw* films, whether they feature a torture scene or not, are frequently cross-cut to bring various threads of the story together.

constructs an 'ocular-specular' spectator, generally associated with 'classical cinema', who is positioned spatially and temporally within the world of the film. To lose this spatial and temporal position induces anxiety, and so editing must 'retrieve, bind up or stitch together' spectator and film (Elsaesser and Hagener, 2010: 90). Certain editing techniques, such as jump cuts or the violation of the 180 degree rule, threaten to expose the instability of the spectator's identification with the film. Whereas in certain mutilation films, the spectator is also dependent upon sound to defend against the threat of loss,[49] *Hostel*'s and *Saw II – 3D*'s spectator depends primarily on the fragile relationship between each image as dictated by camera placement and shot sequence.

The movements of the camera around the victim may create a sense of claustrophobia, yet they constitute a desired but tenuous relationship between spectator and film. The cuts happen so fast it is difficult to discern them when viewing the film without pausing it. The spectator thus fluctuates from being jolted erratically, to being swung dizzyingly, through the space of the film. As well as constructing panic and anxiety through mimesis as they arise through movement, the spectator is also threatened with the loss of their spatial and temporal positioning within the film. As Elsaesser and Hagener state: 'the anxiety on the part of the spectator of losing coherence and the threat of being either abandoned or exposed become the very glue that makes her/him stick the more fervently to the filmic flow' (2010: 90). The spectator's position is paradoxical: although in the position of a torture victim, she/he desires this connection because the threat of loss creates

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[49] See Chapter Four: Extreme Frequencies where I discuss the use of jump cuts, overlaid by a continuous low rumble, in Lars von Trier's *Antichrist* (2009)

anxiety. In contrast to any reputation these films have of being particularly sadistic,[50] the spectatorship of the first stage of assault, which is always the longest stage, is clearly masochistic.[51] The victims of torture, whether male or female, are not held within the mastery of the gaze as the spectator arises from, and identifies with, their suffering.

After the expectation stage of the assault, comes the mutilating wound-image, which shows the process of bodily destruction. More significantly, in doing so, it shifts the spectator into a voyeuristic position. Instead of being in the position of the victim, the spectator is now gazing upon the victim's body. This is why the mutilating wound-image can seem so jarring: the shift is so sudden. Unlike the previous shift from the look of the camera to position of the victim, which is a relatively gentle, albeit complex, construction through prolonged point of view shots and simultaneous realisations, the mutilating wound-image repositions the spectator in just one cut. It is also the moment that necessitated such a prolonged build-up that ultimately aspires to the 'loss of the awareness that one is sitting in a movie theatre' (Rushton, 2002: 114). The viewer as spectator (who is 'emptied of all contents' (Rushton, 2002: 113)), is now forcefully and painfully returned to their bodily senses as the on-screen mutilations constitute their physicality.

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[50] With its 'classical' editing and construction of the gaze through the mutilated body-image, it is tempting to consider these films as sadistic in accordance with Laura Mulvey's article 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975). Critics also often refer to such films as sadistic, one example being Roger Ebert in his review of *Wolf Creek* (Greg Mclean, 2005), where he asks '[t]here is a role for violence in film, but what the hell is the purpose of this sadistic celebration of pain and cruelty?' *(Chicago Sun-Times,* 2005).
[51] See Lockwood ('All Stripped Down,' 2009) who also suggests that the spectatorship constructed by the torture narrative is a masochistic one.

The mutilating wound-image comes in many varied forms, as detailed above. Whereas some may take up the entire frame, others may include different visuals such as props and setting; however, they are always foregrounded to be the main focus of the shot, and to create enough strength of cut to force the spectator into a voyeuristic position. The first mutilating wound-image in *Hostel* occurs thirteen shots into Josh's assault. The shots prior to this have varied from the long point-of-view shots at the start, to medium shots of Josh, to close-up shots of his cuffed hands and feet. During this time, the camera repeatedly returns to the same positions, creating a familiarity with certain points in the room. When this is deviated from via the mutilating wound-image, the effect of the cut is even more jarring. The flesh is shown in extreme close-up, close enough to see the pores of the skin *(see fig 1.13)*.[52] The flesh fills the screen, the wound is off-centre right and the drill has entered it from the right of the frame, as blood trickles out. No longer in the position of the victim, the spectator is, for the first time, thrust into the position of the torturer. In *Saw II – 3D,* the spectator is frequently aligned with the tool. But, in both, the implication is the same: the spectator's gaze is penetrating the victim and tearing his/her flesh.

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[52] The flesh seen is actually a joint of pork and the drill is being manipulated by the director, Eli Roth.
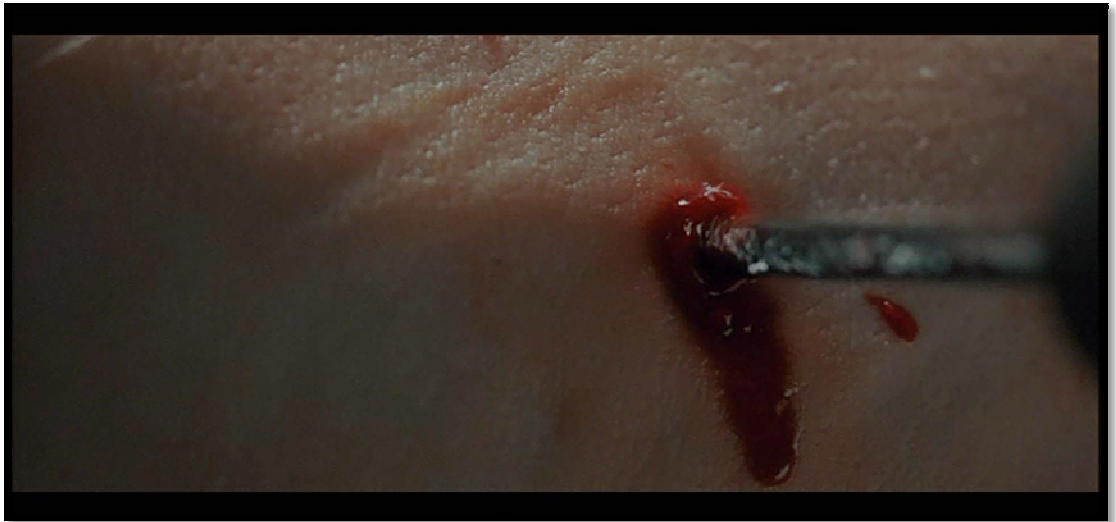
Figure 1.13: *Hostel*: **The mutilating wound-image – the spectator is thrust into the position of the torturer.**

The second mutilating wound-image in Josh's assault reinforces the destructive force of the gaze. The actual mutilation in this instance occurs off-screen. A medium close-up of Josh's head and shoulders shows him screaming, and pushing against his restraints, as the torturer bends down behind him, and a ripping sound is heard on the soundtrack. Shortly after this, there is a close-up revealing Josh's ankles, no longer cuffed to the chair, and two deep wounds open across his Achilles tendons as he falls forward. Although the actual cutting has already been done, the wound is still in the process of mutilation as skin, sinew and tendons separate. This 'dual' mutilation offers the rare position for the spectator: no longer in the position of the torturer, or even the tool, the gaze alone tears open the flesh *(see fig 1.14).*

In these moments, although the wound is a spectacle, what is constituted is not a disembodied voyeur. Instead, the spectatorship is embodied. In *The Skin of the Film,* Marks explores the notion of an 'embodied visuality' that does not hold vision as

master over the object it sees, but rather 'yields to the thing seen, a vision that is not merely cognitive but acknowledges its location in the body' (2000: 151, 132). Such a spectatorship constitutes the body of the viewer as they/you/I acknowledge the location of the wound in our bodies. Often, when a particular area of the body is mutilated, the viewer experiences a form of heightened sensitivity in their own corresponding body part. I call this phenomena 'corporeal mimicry', as the viewer's physicality mimics what is seen on screen.[53] These are a kind of haptic image, as they 'invite the viewer to respond to the image in an intimate and embodied way, and thus facilitate the experience of other sensory impressions as well' (2). The most striking aspect of these images is that they negate the distinction of losing one's self to the text and acknowledging one's own body, as one occurs as a direct result of the other. *Saw II – 3D* and *Hostel,* therefore, are not only disturbing for their graphic imagery, but for the way they betray the illusion of distance between the viewer and film. Further, once the spectatorship becomes voyeuristic, the body that is gazed upon has become synonymous with, and continues to constitute, the viewer's own corporeality *as it is being mutilated*. The flesh is literally penetrated and torn by the gaze at the same time the mutilating wound-image renders the viewer as deteriorating. In this way, the mutilating wound-image returns the sadistic and

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[53] Certain parts of the body are far more susceptible than others and are, consequently, capitalised on by film-makers. Such parts include eyes, teeth, nails, Achilles tendon and tongue. The most effective instance of corporeal mimicry that resonates with me is the scene towards the end of Park Chan-wook's *Oldboy* (2003), where the lead protagonist, Dae-su Oh, cuts off his own tongue. Such instances are, of course, not isolated to the physical mutilation film or even the horror film. Another example often mentioned when speaking about films that cause discomfort is the crime drama *American History X,* (Tony Kaye, 1998), when the lead protagonist Derek (played by Edward Norton), kills a Crip member by forcing him to grip the curb of the pavement with his teeth before stamping heavily on the back of his head. This form of mimicry is essential to Linda William's theorisation of what she calls 'body genres' – films with a bodily excess on the screen that engages the body of the screen in a particular way (she does not include musicals or comedies as the responses are not direct modes of mimicry). Williams argues that whether the mimicry is exact ('whether the spectator at the porn film actually orgasms, whether the spectator at the horror film actually shudders in fear') is evidence of the film's success (1999: 704). I would suggest that the same is true of the mutilation film – hence the remarkable success of the *Saw* films compared to a series such as *Wrong Turn* (although this series has a cult following, all except the original were released straight to DVD).

destructive gaze, as the viewer looks upon a representation of her/his self in the process of mutilation.
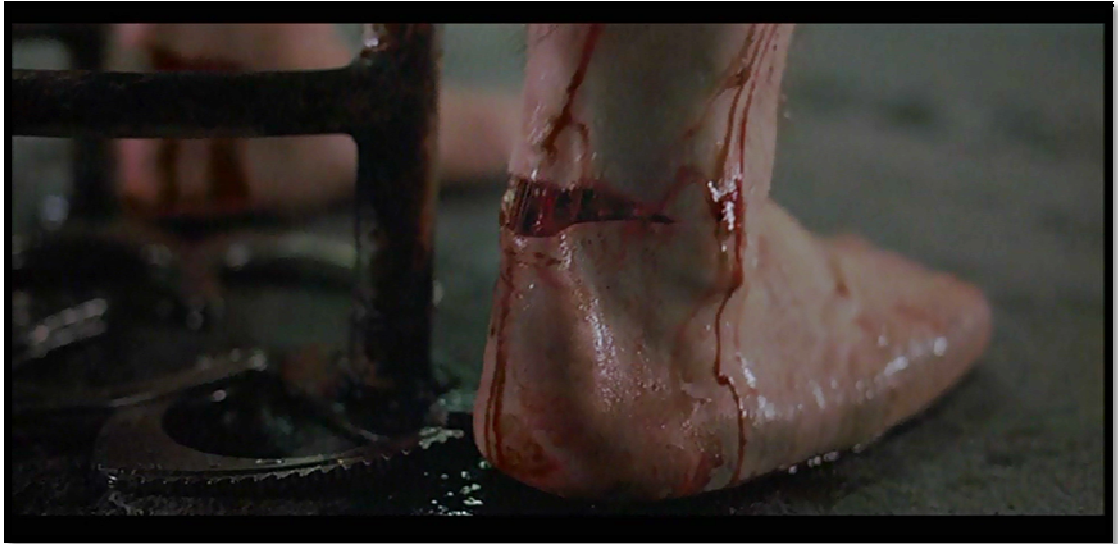
Figure 1.14: *Hostel*: **The gaze alone tears the flesh.**

Sound is also particularly important in the generation of corporeal mimicry. Before the 'dual' mutilation, the ripping sound over the medium close-up shot of Josh's head and shoulders anticipates the disfigurement. As film scholar Peter Hutchings notes in his book, *The Horror Film,* a sound that creates a space off-screen is a 'vital element in the creation of cinematic suspense' (2004: 129). However, sound does not remain separate from its object for very long, in this instance. Hutchings reminds us that 'it is standard practice in mainstream cinema … for sounds initially separated from their source to be reunited with that source at some point' (129). The ripping sound creates a sound-image where the object of the noise is imagined. However, two shots later, the corresponding mutilating wound-image emerges, and a focus is created on which the sound is laid. Anxiety is therefore held within the limits of the

image; once the image changes, i.e. the film moves on to another scene, or even simply another shot, the previous suspense, anxiety, fear, anticipation and panic are relieved.

Sound is submissive to the image in *Hostel* and *Saw II – 3D.* In these films, sound is 'largely perceived and appreciated … in visual terms'; therefore, as film editor and sound designer Walter Murch states in his foreword to Michel Chion's book *Audio-Vision*; 'the better the sound, the better the image' (1994: viii). Sound works for the image to 'create a particular atmosphere' or 'to underline or augment moments of shock and violence' (Hutchings, 2004: 128). The use of music in *Hostel* and *Saw II – 3D* is similar to that of most horror films: 'conventional and indistinguishable from other forms of film music' (146). One of its main uses is to locate the films in both time and space. Throughout the *Saw* films, there is a pervasive drone made up of sighing winds, singing metals and occasional percussive beats, which place the film firmly in a contemporary urban setting. As musicologist Simon Frith, in his book *Performing Rites,* notes;

> [i]n the twentieth century there has been not only a significant increase in the sheer quantity of noise, but also a shift in our underlying sense of silence: technology provides us with a permanent hum, a continued sonic presence (1998: 100).

A significant portion of the *Saw* franchise scores were written by Charlie Clouser – a composer, producer and re-mixer, who has worked with industrial and rock bands such as Nine Inch Nails, Marilyn Manson and Rammstein. His work lends a dark, grimy, underworld feel to the films; one could believe that the *Saw* franchise and

Se7en belong to the same on-screen universe.[54] Also to set the scene, *Hostel* includes excerpts of '5 Seconds', by the Californian rock band Shortie, to present the 3 main characters, two of which are Californian; 'Some Kinda Freak', by the house music band Mephisto, to introduce a club venue; and 'Drzim Ti Miesto' by Team, a popular Slovakian rock band, when the film setting moves to Slovakia. Even the dissonant chords heard throughout *Saw II – 3D* and *Hostel,* although eerie,[55] are now 'characteristic' and, according to Hutchings, 'the most straight-forward aspect of horror film music from the 1950s onwards' (2004: 146). However, it is perhaps the most well-known convention of film music (the orchestral score), and the most recognised horror film sound (the scream), that function to construct physicality in these films.

The most prominent sound in *Saw II – 3D* and *Hostel* is the scream. The cinematic scream is frequently associated with the female. In her book, *The Acoustic Mirror*, Kaja Silverman argues that it is 'the most exemplary of female sounds (at least within classic cinema)' (1988: 69). In *The Voice in Cinema,* Michel Chion suggests certain films as 'production[s] mobilized in order for everything to be lost and spent in a woman's scream' (1999: 77).[56] One possible reason for this, put forward by Rhona Berenstein in her book *Attack of the Leading Ladies,* is that this particular

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[54] The opening of *Se7en* also features an uncredited remix of the Nine Inch Nails track 'Closer'. *Se7en*'s original score was written by Howard Shore, who also wrote the score for the urban dystopian films *Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991) and *Crash* (David Cronenberg, 1996).
[55] In particular, the composer for *Hostel,* Nathan Barr, came up with a simple tritone that he repeated throughout the film. Occasionally he would play it on a glass harmonica, an instrument invented by Benjamin Franklin, which has a particularly eerie sound. The tritone, or the interval, has associations with the devil and evil in music (see http://www.musicarrangers.com/star-theory/c01.htm Last accessed 09.01.2013); yet, the prevalence in horror films has made even this discordant sound a well known convention.
[56] Chion references *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960)*,* the original *King Kong* (Merian C. Cooper, Ernest B. Schoedsack, 1933) *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1956)*, Blow-Out* (Brian De Palma, 1981)*,* and part of *The Towering Inferno* (John Guillermin, 1974).

sound places abject terror onto the female and thus away from the male (1996: 123). Similarly, Silverman argues that the 'sought-after cry' is 'a mechanism for disavowing the male subject's early history, and for displacing onto women all traces of corporeal excess and discursive impotence' (94). In her book, *Men Women and Chainsaws,* Carol Clover suggests that the scream finally reminds us that the final girl, who has previously been coded masculine, 'really is female' (1992: 58). Understandably, studies of horror films from the 'classic' era[57] right through to the slasher film focus on the female scream because the (screaming) victims were predominantly women.[58] However, the first two assaults in *Hostel* are against young men, and there is no clear preference in *Saw II– 3D* for either gender. How then, does the scream function within these films?

In reference to a 'queasy range of pulsing textures', including a sub-bass frequency of 27hz, Tim Palmer suggests that Gaspar Noé's *Irréversible* (2001) creates a 'sheer aural chaos' (2006: 29). Such sounds serve to overwhelm the senses and inhibit other sensory input, thus inducing anxiety as an awareness of the (potentially dangerous) surroundings is impaired. It is an auditory equivalent of the numerous instances in films where anxiety and fear are created by the restriction of vision, therefore the monster/psycho-killer/babysitter could be lurking just beyond the periphery of the senses. The scream becomes physical as an obstructive object, cloaking the ears against other sounds. It is also another way to create a strong identification between spectator and victim, and to confuse the notions of spectator and viewer. Music

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[57] I use the term 'classic horror' following Rhona Berestein's use of the term to connote the 'first sound horror cycle' that can be traced back to *Dracula* and ends in 1936, 'the year in which the A-budget devotion to horror concluded (B-productions however, continued)' (1996: 14-15).

[58] In spite of a common perception that the slasher film victim was predominantly female, many *many* males fall prey to killers in these films as well. The difference in gender is marked by the representation of the murder – female deaths tend to last longer and feature a lot more screaming.

theorist, Arnie Cox, hypothesises in his article 'The Mimetic Hypothesis,' that 'part of how we understand … human-made sounds is in terms of our own experience of making the same or similar' (2001: 196). The screams in this film generate physicality through an understanding of an embodied mode of being in the world.

There are two significant moments in *Hostel* where music serves to push the victim back when they want to move forward, and move the victim forward when they want to go back. In the initial assault, after Josh has fallen to the floor with severed tendons, he begins to crawl towards the door that the torturer has invitingly left open. For the first time in this scene, music is heard; it begins with a dissonant glissando that gives way to a rapid three note ostinato. The music both creates and mocks Josh's predicaments as it refuses to reach a climax, continuously returning to the beginning note. A frustrated forward movement is created through Josh's feeble attempt towards the door, however the relentless repetition of notes strains against this motion to generate a tension that is only released when the torturer grabs Josh by his hair and slits his throat. Creating movement (or a tension of motion) through music is repeated later in the film when Paxton is dragged away to his torture chamber. A full orchestra plays a rousing score, its urgency both drives the narrative forward and pushes Paxton towards his fate. His hands scrabble in futile gestures against the crumbling brick walls, and his feet kick against nothing but air as he his drawn towards what will surely be his death.[59] The music continues to increase in volume, until it holds onto one final resonating note that ends only as the door to the chamber slams shut, leaving both Paxton and spectator in darkness.

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[59] Although it doesn't result in his death in *this* film, the fact he has entered the warehouse and seen the inner workings of the elite hunting group means he will inevitably die. Indeed, he dies during the opening of *Hostel II*.

The most prolific track used in the *Saw* franchise was originally called 'Hello Zepp' for the first film, before being remixed, renamed and replayed at the end of each sequel. As was the case during Paxton's capture, this particular score is effective for creating rousing emotion. Although this track heightens the senses and raises the heartbeat, I would argue it works more to purge the spectator of anxiety where the narrative fails to do so. *Hostel* is somewhat open ended (Paxton does escape, but the underground elite group that buys and kills young backpackers for thrills still exist), however there is a sense that every question the film originally posed has been answered. As I have mentioned before, Cowie argues that any closure, good or bad, is still the cessation of unpleasure and therefore desired (2003: 29). The narratives of *Saw II – 3D* are different, however. With each ending, more questions are raised than are answered; with each sequel, the plot becomes so full of twists and turns, the short conclusions are unsatisfactory when it comes to tying each loose end and leaving it to rest. This is where 'Hello Zepp' is used to its full potential.

Now known as the 'Saw Theme', the track played at the end of each film in the *Saw* franchise is made up of a rhythmic mandolin sequence, filtered drum loop, a string section tempered by an undercurrent of abrasive noise and aggressive live drumming. It repeatedly builds up to a climax before relaxing and building up again. This pattern is representative of the narrative structure that builds the spectator into a frenzy of suspense and anticipation before releasing them with the mutilating and mutilated wound image. With a sense of tonal resolution at the closing cue, the track works as a metonym for the anticipation/mutilation/aftermath narrative, thus creating

a sense of relief at the end, although there are still more questions to be answered and, of course, the threat of Jigsaw and/or his legacy still exist.

As important as sound undoubtedly is to the horror film, and *Hostel* and *Saw II – 3D* are no exceptions, it is the mutilating wound-image that constructs these films' very particular spectatorships. The sadistic penetrative gaze is, of course, nothing new. A recurring trope of the slasher genre is the point-of-view shot attributable to the killer, positioning the spectator as psycho-murderer via the gaze. Indeed, Lockwood considers torture porn to have 'displaced the postmodern slasher' (2009: 41). However, Lockwood emphasises the masochistic gaze in both of these subgenres as he draws on Clover's argument in *Men, Women and Chainsaws,* that the (male masochistic) spectator identifies with the victim rather than the killer. The singularity of the mutilating wound-image in physical mutilation films is its tendency to conflate these long opposing theories of horror spectatorship. The presence of the mutilating wound-image shifts the mode of spectatorship from masochistic to voyeuristic and sadistic, while at the same time remaining powerfully embodied.

The final mutilating wound-image to be discussed in this chapter occurs in the third assault in *Hostel.* A girl staying at the same hostel as Josh and his friends, Kana, has also been captured and tortured, until she is rescued by Paxton who is making his own getaway. Although her torturer has been shot dead, they are further hindered in their escape, as Kana's eyeball hangs out of her severely burned socket, and she is too distressed to go anywhere in such a condition. Spectatorial identification is still with Paxton (as the narrative has been following him closely during his attempt to

flee the warehouse) yet it is also now with the inflictor of pain and mutilation as he is the one who has to sever her optical nerve. Anticipation is once again created as he picks up some scissors, and then prolonged as they both prepare themselves for what is about to occur *(see fig 1.15)*. In this instance, the revelation of torture and anticipation both occur in the same medium shot before the film cuts to a medium close-up of Kana's face as the scissors cut through her eye stem and yellow pus oozes out. As Paxton steels himself up for committing this mutilation, he represents the position of the spectator that both gazes upon, and creates, a torturous act that is physically affective for themselves as well as the victim. Both Paxton and spectator thus attack the origin of the gaze – the eye – that has been objectified through mutilation, as they are themselves attacked. Opposing the quote that opened this chapter, this scene reminds us of the intrinsic connection between the gaze and embodiment, and undermines the mastery of the ocular-specular spectator.

Figure 1.15: *Hostel***: Paxton and spectator attack the origins of the gaze.**

Throughout this thesis I aim, in part, to broach the query of how and why certain films are so compellingly unpleasurable to watch. I argue that this pattern of

anticipation – assault – aftermath is actually more concerned with the production of pleasure. By tying anxiety and panic to an object, the mutilating wound-image enables the same pattern to be repeated again and again. Unlike the spectatorships of *Dans Ma Peau* (Marina de Van, 2002) *Irréversible*, *Antichrist* or *Srpski Film* (Srdjan Spasojevic, 2010), which are built on a linear trajectory of disintegration, that of *Hostel* and *Saw II – 3D* are held in stasis, following a circuitous trail of anticipation and cessation of unpleasure. Each assault exists as a self-contained scenario; they interrupt the narrative rather than push it forward. The frequent presence of fade-ins, fade-outs, and shots of black bookend these intervals and inhibit anxiety from permeating the entire film. The spectator is trapped in a never-ending pursuit of the cessation of unpleasure. In the preface to her book, *Over Her Dead Body*, Elisabeth Bronfen suggests that death in art allows us to 'die with another and return to the living' and thus 'our belief in our own immortality is confirmed' (1992: x). With each assault, this belief may be repeatedly reaffirmed: the mutilating wound-image takes the body out of suspense, releases the anxiety, and there is always another victim to replace them. The victim's body is the new Michael Myers and Freddy Krueger – although its very presence promises pain and anxiety, nevertheless it holds the promise of immortality as it returns to the screen again and again.

Chapter Two: Mutilation as Spectacle

While undeniably spectacular, the money shot is also hopelessly specular (Williams, 1999: 94).

The previous chapter focused on a surprisingly elusive image. In spite of the reputation films such as the *Saw* franchise (James Wan, 2004; Darren Lynn Bousman, 2005, 2006, 2007; David Hackl, 2008; Kevin Greutert, 2009, 2010), and *Hostel* (Eli Roth, 2005), have of being obsessed with the bloody destruction of human flesh, actually detailing the process of mutilation in graphic visuals is a technique sparingly utilised. This chapter focuses on an image that is far more prolific throughout the sub-genre known as 'torture porn'. This particular, yet spectacularly varied, image makes up the third stage of the assault: the aftermath.[60] Bodies have been stabbed, flayed, burnt and dismembered; what I call the mutilated wound-image now comes to the fore.

The mutilated wound-image is as recognised as it is reviled. It is the blood that gushes out of severed arteries; the intestines exposed by ripped flesh; the pus that oozes from infected sores. The result of mutilation, the mutilated wound-image is the body that was, the signifier of fragmentation and deconstruction, the body that will never again be whole. In Chapter One, I began defining and theorising a spectatorship that is constructed through a focus on the process of bodily disfigurement that is preceded by a lengthy and complex shift of identifications. By

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[60] In Chapter One I distinguished a particular sequence of narrative repeated throughout *Hostel* and *Saw II-3D* that I termed the assault. The term encapsulates three stages: anticipation, when what is about to transpire is realised by both victim and spectator and consequently anticipated; the mutilation, where the body is attacked in a variety of ways; and the aftermath, namely blood, pus, bones, brains and viscera. See Chapter One for a detailed elaboration on the first two stages of the assault.

generating corporeal mimicry – where the viewer's awareness and sensitivity towards a particular body part becomes heightened as a direct result of the mutilation on-screen – *Saw II-3D* and *Hostel* interrogate the distinction between spectator as textual construction and the viewer in the theatre. In this moment, while the viewer is grounded in their fleshy embodiment, their physicality is constituted by the films' spectatorships. This chapter aims to explore what happens to this confusion of notions and blurring of boundaries once the torture is done and all that remains is the leftovers of mutilation.

First, how should the mutilated wound-image be defined in the context of physical mutilation films? From the description given above, it is immediately clear that this image emerges in a large variety of genres such as thrillers, comedies, gangster and all manner of horror films. How they function as part of the narrative structure, and the spectatorships they construct, are undoubtedly diverse and complex; however, this chapter is concerned with the image that arises from an overt preoccupation with, and consequent mutilation of, the human body. By analysing the stages of the assault, I have been arguing that these films have, and repeat, a specific sequence of narrative that continuously promises the viewer the cessation of unpleasure. How the mutilated wound-image exists within this structure – how it continues to both threaten and (re)affirm the distinction between viewer and spectator, viewer and film – is the main focus of this chapter. Further, there are many instances of the mutilated wound-image arising in the absence of the process of mutilation i.e. the mutilat*ing* wound-image;[61] however, my arguments centre on the anticipation-climax-release that the mutilation and aftermath of disfigurement create, in part, when they occur in

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[61] See Chapter One: Embodied Voyeurism for the definition of the mutilating wound-image.

tandem. For this reason, and for the purpose of continuity, I will continue to analyse *Hostel* and *Saw II – 3D* with the aim to answer the following questions: how does the mutilated wound-image function in the anticipation-climax-release sequence of narrative that is repeated throughout these films? How do these images construct physicality? Does the aftermath of mutilation continue to interrogate the notions of spectator and viewer, or does it instead serve to re-affirm viewer/film, subject/object dichotomies?

There are many kinds of mutilated wound-images in the physical mutilation film: scorched, torn, drilled skin; broken, crushed, splintered bone; dismembered, mangled, flayed bodies; wounds caused by acid, fire, chainsaws, nails, needles, knives, hacksaws, elaborate traps, scissors, scalpels, baseball bats, piano wire, sledgehammers, steam, bombs, chains, pokers, electric currents and, occasionally, a fire extinguisher. Amidst this imaginative array of ways to disfigure the human body, there are two distinguishable forms of the mutilated wound-image; the first is in movement and the second is in stasis. I discriminate between these two sub-types because, as will be explored in this chapter, I argue that they each have a different narrative function and construct two distinct modes of spectatorship.

Hostel and *Saw II – 3D* belong to two very successful and lucrative franchises that together total ten films.[62] All the narratives of these films are built on a

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[62] I have chosen to omit *Saw* (James Wan, 2004) from my close textual analyses due to it being very different in tone to the rest of the films, in spite of its influences on the films that follow it. It is not preoccupied with the process of mutilation and therefore does not allow me to consider the assault sequence of narrative in full. I have also excluded *Hostel II* (Eli Roth, 2007) and *Hostel III* (Scott Spiegel, 2011) because, although they do relate to the distinct formula I am interrogating in these

preoccupation with torture, either for pleasure (*Hostel*) or for pseudo-therapeutic means (*Saw II – 3D*). In *Hostel* and *Saw II – 3D,* the climax of the torture – where the process of mutilation is foregrounded – is very brief, particularly in comparison to the sequences that lead up to it. Although the focus of these first two chapters is a group of significant images, a large part of both chapters is dedicated to understanding how the process of mutilation constitutes a shift in spectatorship and, for that, a detailed analysis of the lead up to the torture is necessary. The mutilated wound-image, first in movement and then in stasis, comprises further shifts in the seeming rollercoaster of spectatorships that torture scenes create. At the very moment where the mutilation is occurring, the spectator is moved from a close tie with the victim, to an identification with the victim as both subject and object, as the sadistic and masochistic gaze collapse into one. At this point, notions of spectator and viewer are blurred and complex. This chapter will consider how the mutilated wound-image in stasis signals the end of this transformation as (fragments of) the victim become(s) an object for the spectator that is now, once again, ocular-specular.[63] The movement of the image that precedes this shift, then, refers not only to what occurs on-screen, but also to the repositioning and redefinition of the spectator and viewer in a very short period of time.

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chapters, it would result in unnecessary repetition. This is not to say that these films, amongst many others, are not mutilation films. They all hold a fascination with the destruction of human flesh and they all, to a degree, generate physical responses. That they do not all fully facilitate my exploration of a particular mode of spectatorship is not evidence of limitations of this study, but rather of further research possibilities into physical spectatorship and the mutilation film.

[63] In their book, *Film Theory*, Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener define the ocular-specular spectator as a construction of classical cinema that 'keeps its disembodied spectators at arm's length while also drawing them in' (2010: 18). See Chapter One for a consideration of this mode of spectatorship in relation to *Hostel* and *Saw II – 3D*.

The mutilated wound-image in movement is where blood, pus and viscera are still pouring out of the injury made by the process of mutilation. The mutilation has occurred, the wound has been opened, but bodily fluids and wastes continue to emit from various (usually human-made) orifices.[64] A particularly potent and influential example of this image comes towards the end of Akira Kurosawa's *Sanjuro* (1962), when the eponymous samurai kills the corrupt official Hanbei and a fantastic amount of blood explodes out of his chest. In his commentary for *Hostel,* director Eli Roth speaks of the influence Japanese cinema has had on his work, in particular Akira Kurosawa and Takashi Miike (the latter has his own cameo in the film). This influence is nowhere more evident than in the second assault of *Hostel*. Paxton, one of three young men (the others being Josh and Olie) to travel across Europe, has been captured by an underground group who auction off backpackers to the highest bidder for the purpose of torture and execution. Both Olie and Josh have already fallen prey to the Elite Hunting Group. Paxton now sits handcuffed to a chair at the mercy of a chainsaw wielding killer; his fingers are consequently severed resulting in a spectacular blood-flow display, rivalling that of *Sanjuro (see fig 2.1)*. Although there are numerous examples of the mutilated wound-image in movement throughout *Saw II – 3D* and *Hostel,* I argue that all signify a particular shift in spectatorship and, as the most prominent, it is Paxton's wound that this section will focus on.

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[64] I do not consider the image where, in the first torture scene of *Hostel*, Josh's Achilles tendons separate after the mutilation has occurred, to be a mutilated wound-image in movement. This is because the mutilation is still in process as long as the wound is still opening up (see Chapter One for a full analysis of this image). Blood, pus and viscera in movement are an after-effect of the process of mutilation.

Figure 2.1: *Hostel*: **The mutilated wound-image in movement is often a spectacular blood-flow display.**

Paxton's torture scene, like Josh's, begins with a build-up that places the spectator into the victim's position. It starts with Paxton wandering through a crumbling disused warehouse, the purpose of which, he has been told, is for an art exhibit. A point-of-view shot zooms slowly in on a door at the end of a corridor. The shot is dully lit and the colours are washed out; the warehouse is a dystopian double for the ambient brothel earlier on in the film where soft blue/purple lighting and stylised décor provided the setting for the three young men's quest for sexual fulfilment. The lie that lured Paxton here is not entirely without meaning – an art exhibit implies objects will be on display and, by walking into this warehouse, Paxton has begun his transition into passive artefact. As he is dragged away, the point-of-view shots continue: medium shots of Paxton show his head turning from left to right and these shots are cut as the camera tracks quickly along the sides of the corridor, first from left to right and then from right to left. Various scenes of torture are visible through intermittent openings in the walls; these are not stylised silhouettes and there are no

satisfied moans on the soundtrack. The objectification of the human body is no longer represented via the pleasure of the male; rather it is rendered as horrific in the colour of blood and the sound of screams. When Paxton/camera/spectator sees Josh's corpse, lying in medium shot on a table undergoing an amateur autopsy, Paxton looks upon the object he is in danger of becoming if he crosses that threshold at the end of the corridor.

The shots of various tortures are theatrical. The doorways create a series of proscenium arches and, the cinema screen represents the fourth wall; it is a theatre of cruelty. Indeed, the first piece of 'theatre' Paxton sees is the torturer from the first assault scene leaning over Josh's body, recalling Antonin Artaud's play *The Philosopher's Stone*, which begins with a Doctor, on a stage lit in red,[65] 'hacking away at a pile of dummies and dismembering them' (Bermel, 1977: 57). The shot construction in *Hostel*, and the aesthetic parallel it draws with Artaud's famously grisly productions, places the camera/spectator/Paxton in the position of an audience at the theatre, distanced from the actions taking place before them. Yet, there is also a disturbing comparison to be drawn between Paxton's, Josh's and Olie's earlier behaviour towards women, the faceless torturers and the mode of spectatorship constructed by the mutilated wound-image. All point to the objectification of something else; here, Paxton is in the horror of being threatened with objectification himself.

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[65] According to the stage directions detailed in Albert Bermel, *Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty,* (1977) pp56-57.

The threat that Paxton faces – the danger of objectification – is represented literally through the mutilation of the body, and points to the relationship between viewer and spectator. The fragile construction of spectatorship, and the unstable engagements between viewer and film, are defined by the dichotomy of subject and object. Often regarded as a hierarchy, physical mutilation films play with this dualism by pushing the viewer's limits of objectification. In doing so, they threaten notions of the subject. Certain films, particularly the horror genre, have been theorised to endanger the concept of the unified subject by foregrounding particular character types, narratives and iconographies that arguably call upon primal and repressed fears and desires.[66] Yet, there are also conventions that the horror film draws on to protect and affirm the viewer's sense of self, such as the defeat of the monster and/or the impression of an ending.[67] In her influential book, *The Monstrous Feminine,* Barbara Creed suggests that a fifth look 'distinguishes the screen-spectator relationship' (1993: 29) by protecting the 'obliteration of self' (28). This is the 'not-look' (28, 29) where the viewer looks away and hides behind their hands or cushion ('to look anywhere but at the screen') in order to withdraw from identification (28). I would suggest that the particular act of turning away from the screen that Creed is referring to distinguishes the screen-spectator relationship to the extent that it disrupts it, and reconfigures the boundary between viewer and spectator, viewer and film, thereby relieving the anxiety of a loss of distinction between the subjective self and the

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[66] See footnote 30 in the Introduction to this thesis for an overview on theories of horror.

[67] For example, in her article 'The Lived Nightmare' Elizabeth Cowie argues that whether an ending is pleasant or unpleasant is not important; what is significant is that there is an ending to, and therefore a cessation of, the unpleasure that came before it (2003: 29). In the philosophy of horror, Noël Carroll suggests that 'art-horror' is an emotion 'that the creators of the genre have perennially sought to instil in their audiences' (1990: 24); however; this is not where the pleasure lies. Carroll suggests that the fascination for the unknown eventually outweighs the art-horror (192). Both these ideas, to some extent, attempt to find the enjoyment in spite of the horror, rather than in the horror itself. I would prefer to take an approach that attempts to locate the motivation for viewing the mutilation film within the anxiety-induced physical responses it generates. I elaborate more on this in the conclusion to this thesis.

objective film. However, one of the defining features of *Hostel* and *Saw II – 3D* is the visual detail of mutilation; therefore the film does not look away,[68] and the viewer who chooses to remain looking at the mutilation on-screen potentially experiences an intense corporeal response that subverts the dichotomy of viewer-subject/film-object. How then, if they do so at all, do these films provide this protection from the danger of an obliteration of the subject? One way, I would suggest, is with the emergence of the mutilating wound-image in movement.

Paxton's torture begins with a 35 second shot of blackness, and his whimpers and movements against his restraints are foregrounded on the soundtrack, thus the spectatorship continues to create close ties with the victim. As with Josh, Paxton becomes aware of what is about to happen to him at the same time as it is revealed to the spectator – although this time it is not through image, but sound; as the camera focuses on Paxton's struggling feet, the noise of a chainsaw comes on the soundtrack, and he freezes. The camera then tilts up to reveal his body from behind, recalling the similar treatment of an attractive female receptionist earlier in the film, further highlighting these young men's passage into objectification (and displacing the female from the position of the object). The scene has a different tone to Josh's, however, which comes from the behaviour of the torturer. Josh's torturer was very calm and sure of himself, with smooth fluent movements, and a hint of a smile in his eyes as he looked at Josh/camera/spectator. In contrast, Paxton's persecutor, again

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[68] Creed refers to the act of the viewer who looks away; however, it is also frequently customary for the horror film to enact this fifth look itself by cutting or moving away at the very moment such a threat emerges, thereby protecting from an obliteration of the unified subject, while maintaining a mode of spectatorship that does not disrupt the engagement between viewer and film, yet also avoiding a forceful interrogation of the distinction or blurring of spectator and viewer. Such techniques are clearly not utilised in *Hostel* and *Saw II – 3D* however, as they delight in the visual detail of mutilation.

wearing a mask, appears as anxious as his victim. His eyes are wide in fear, his movements are hesitant, and he makes amateurish mistakes, such as ball-gagging his prey when his actions (holding a chainsaw to Paxton's head) are likely to cause the victim to vomit in terror, thus choking and dying too early and depriving the killer of a prolonged act of play *(see fig 2.2)*. These attributes make him humorous, and could serve to weaken the affective potential of the scene. However, because the spectator has been so closely tied to Paxton, the humour takes on a sinister quality and the assault remains disturbing.[69]

Figure 2.2: *Hostel*: **Paxton's torturer appears nervous, hesitant, and easily panics, lending an aura of humour to the scene.**

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[69]I would suggest that, when an image is dominantly comedic rather than dominantly horrific (i.e. it may induce horror in the viewer but amusement and laughter overwhelm such a response), close identifications with the victim have not been constructed, therefore the fast shifts that threaten the stability of the spectatorship are inhibited and the generation of corporeal mimicry is relatively moderate. We could perhaps compare this to comedy-horror scenes such as *Severance* (Christopher Smith, 2006)*,* where one of the characters gets his leg severed in a bear trap – how this sequence succeeds in generating a laughter response is outside the realms of this thesis; however, it differs greatly in tone to the torture scenes in *Hostel* and *Saw II – 3D* due to a lack of close character identification. In his book, *Subversive Pleasures*, Robert Stam observes that, within Carnival, for Bakhtin, laughter represents universality, a 'cosmic gaiety that is directed at everyone' (1989: 86-87). While I would not go so far as to suggest Paxton's torture scene is a representation of Bakhtin's Carnival proper, the comedy and laughter that comes from, and is directed towards, his torturer serves to humanise him; the hierarchical distinction between faceless torturer and sympathetic victim that was so prevalent in Josh's scene is here temporarily confused, and could potentially disrupt the viewer's visceral engagement with the film. That the scene remains disturbing is testament to the strength of identification that has been created between spectator and victim.

Although the mutilation is anticipated, as the torture scene is now a familiar one (this is the second main torture sequence of *Hostel,* Josh's being the first), it also appears to be sudden, as it is a result of another mistake made by the torturer (he makes a clumsy movement with the chainsaw and cuts off two of Paxton's fingers, ultimately allowing him to escape his handcuffs). Another way it differs from the earlier sequence is that both mutilation and its aftermath occur in the same shot. The process of mutilation lasts only a split-second, contrasting the relatively endless second endured in Josh's torture; far more striking is the sheer amount of blood that spurts out from Paxton's wounds. The imperative of this scene seems less to hold the spectator within the dizzying confines of a sadistic-masochistic gaze, which is the result of an oscillation or collapse of identifications with the self as subject and object, and more to present a spectacular display of expulsion of bodily wastes and fluids.

Unlike the *Saw* films, which always begin with a body that is threatened and/or broken in some way,[70] *Hostel* begins with three young men at the peak of physical health, looking to take advantage of this as they travel across Europe in search of sex. Their youthful, unblemished bodies are evident even in scenes seemingly created for the objectification of women i.e. where they attend a sauna full of beautiful naked Slovakian women and, again, when they finally achieve their travel objective. Like the *Saw* films, however, (and all mutilation films considered in this thesis) these bodies are the target of attack. Certain contemporary horror films, such as *Paranormal Activity 1, 2, 3* and *4* (Orin Peli, 2007, Tod Williams, 2010, Henry

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[70] Indeed, the entire saga began on the premise of one man, John Kramer aka Jigsaw, finding out he had cancer thus pushing him to test others' wills to live.

Joost and Ariel Schulman, 2011, Henry Joost and Ariel Schulman, 2012)*, The Last Exorcism* (Daniel Stamm, 2010)[71] and *Insidious* (James Wan, 2011), retain particular themes that have become classic to the horror genre, for example, the familial/social structure at threat either from an outside force or from within, and the demonic child.[72] Although not necessarily absent from *Hostel* and *Saw II – 3D,* these themes are never the focus of the narrative or dominant source of anxiety. A defining feature of all mutilation films is the attack on, deterioration and fragmentation of, the human body. This may act as a metaphor for the breakdown of a familial structure (eg *À l'intérieur* (Alexandre Bustillo and Julien Maury, 2007)*, Les 7 Jours du Talion,* (Daniel Grou, 2010)) or a society in general (eg *Irréversible* (Gaspar Noé, 2002)*, Srpski Film* (Srdjan Spasojevic, 2010)); taken literally, however, these films speak of, and create, an intense anxiety founded in the flesh. Modes of embodiment, therefore, are where the abject threatens to arise.

A striking aspect of the notion of abjection that is often highlighted in the mutilation film is its paradoxical nature. Although bodily fluids and wastes are abject matter that must be expelled to protect the body, the act of expulsion is, in itself, abject as it blurs the boundaries between inner and outer, life and death, and *creates* the waste that so urgently needs to be banished.[73] Because that which is abject is the victim's

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[71] One of the producers was director of *Hostel* Eli Roth.

[72] For in-depth studies of these themes and the horror film see Andrew Britton, Richard Lippe, Tony Williams, Robin Wood, *American Nightmare* (1979); and Tony Williams, *Hearths of Darkness,* (1996).

[73] For an in-depth study into the nature of abjection see Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* (1982). For a detailed engagement with the horror film through the frameworks of feminism and abjection see Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous Feminine* (1993), where Creed places the horror film in dialogue with Kristeva's notion of the abject to argue that the foundation of all depictions of the monstrous feminine is the reproductive body. For a critique of abjection and the horror film see Cynthia Freeland, *Naked and the Undead* (2002), where Freeland argues that the term has become far too broad when mobilised to analyse the genre of horror, to the point of being 'almost vacuous' (20). In this section of

body, to expel it completely leads to the death of the subject. For the mutilated wound-image in movement, the other is the insides of the victim. It is not symbolised in an external monster, it has been internalised before being crudely externalised once more. Rather than the body protecting 'itself from bodily wastes such as shit, blood, urine and pus by ejecting these things' (Creed, 1993: 9), it is disintegrating into the very same. If nothing else, physical mutilation films point to the disturbing fact that the body cannot protect itself against such things because shit, blood, urine and pus are all the body is. So, if the gushing, flowing, oozing nature of the mutilated wound-image in movement is not expelling the abject, how does the image function as a critical part of the assaults in *Hostel* and *Saw II-3D*?

The mutilated wound-image in movement emphasises not just that which is being expelled, but also the act of expulsion itself. This particular image is the movement and secretion of bodily matter at the same time as it is the shifting modes of identification – from an embodied engagement with the victim's corporeality to a distanced ocular-specular position. In this sense, the expulsion of bodily waste *does* protect from deterioration of the self, as identification with a body that is in the process of objectification is denied. The mutilated wound-image in movement is on the threshold of subject/object; it looks back to the clean and proper body that was, at the same time as it looks toward being an object of mutilation, death and the gaze. The mutilated wound-image in movement is the self in deterioration; having been attacked by an outside force, penetrated and mutilated, it continues to fragment.

the chapter I aim to avoid this criticism by focusing on a particular aspect of abjection that is critical to *Hostel* and *Saw II – 3D*'s spectatorships.

Figure 2.3: *Hostel*: **Paxton is violently and dynamically disintegrating.**

Figure 2.4: *Hostel*: **ball-gag.**

Figure 2.5: *Hostel*: **severed fingers.**

The composition of Paxton's torture scene points to a preoccupation with expulsion – in particular, a fragmentation of parts or items associated with the victim. Frequently, the camera is focused on the ground as an object is thrown into frame: vomit, a ball-gag, severed fingers *(see figs. 2.3, 2.4, 2.5).* Paxton is disintegrating, violently and dynamically. Following the finger severing that resulted in such a dramatic splattering of blood, Paxton is able to squeeze himself out of his restraints and look upon the damage that has been done. A point-of-view shot reveals in medium close-up the bloody stump that has become of his hand *(see fig 2.6).* The mechanised appendage held in front of the camera, with its awkward and jerkily moving 'fingers', represents the object that threatens Paxton's deterioration. As the shot is reversed, there is a medium close-up of Paxton's pained and panicked face, and the bloody stump enters the frame from bottom right, momentarily presenting

Paxton as simultaneously subject and object - clearly divided while at the same time recognisable as one *(see fig 2.6).*[74]

Figure 2.6: *Hostel*: **Paxton as simultaneously subject and object - clearly divided while at the same time recognisable as one.**

The mutilated wound-image in movement is not only the continued disintegration of subject into object, it is also the aftermath of the previous anticipation and climax. A sequence of narrative that has been tightly bound in anticipation, anxiety, and a collapse of sadistic and masochistic gazes, it now begins to redefine spectator/viewer boundaries as the subject on-screen fast becomes an object. In being expelled from suspension and anticipation, a distance is created between the film and viewer. If the spectatorship created by the process of mutilation was an embodied voyeurism, that both grounded the viewer in their physicality, while forming an intensely visceral

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[74] The image that encapsulates the subject becoming object can also be seen at the end of *Saw V*, after a trial of four traps of which the characters of Brit and Mallick are the only survivors *(see fig 2.7).* Mallick holds up a prosthetic arm in front of the camera. His hand and forearm is split in two; he has just been required to insert it into a vertical saw blade in order to lose 5 pints of blood so the bolted door can be opened. At this moment he is on the threshold of death and it is unclear whether he will or does survive, until he appears in a self-help group for survivalists in *Saw 3D*.

engagement through a close identification with the victim's corporeality, then the mutilated wound-image in movement constitutes the look upon that which is becoming not "I". As blood and pus are expelled, the close victim identification is disavowed and the mutilation becomes the object on which the subject gazes.

Figure 2.7: *Saw V*: **Mallick, like Paxton, is presented as both subject and object, split yet joined.**

The mutilated wound-image in movement is a reflection on the release of the tension that has been built up beforehand. Along with the flood of various bodily fluids and matter, this image continues the narrative flow as the sequence winds down and what has been revealed in the climax can be paused and elaborated on. If we were to consider the torture scene as a compressed suspense narrative, where it has the anticipation and build up which leads to the climax, then the mutilated wound-image in movement is the aftermath, namely, where what was once unknown but that has now been revealed is emphasised for the purpose of delivering a satisfying

conclusion.[75] These films, then, are a narrative of the body (or multiple narratives of multiple bodies) where the revelatory conclusion lies in the motion of waste.

Saw II – 3D's and *Hostel*'s modes of spectatorship redefine the boundary between viewer and film partly through the spectacle of the mutilated wound-image in movement. Whether it is a fast flow of blood, a sluggish ooze of sickly yellow pus, or an inelegant tumbling of twisted intestines, these images are a sight to behold. In this, the mutilated wound-image in movement is related to the 'money shot' both in style and in narrative function. In her book *Hard Core,* Linda Williams describes the money shot (penile ejaculation, as opposed to the meat shot, which is the genitals) as being 'hopelessly specular' while taking on 'the narrative function of signalling the climax' and creating 'the sense of an ending' (1989: 94, 93, 93). As defined above, the mutilated wound-image in movement is not the climax in itself, rather it is the visual signifier of the torturous apex. Further, it points to the end of the torture, and thereby the visceral engagement between viewer and film. In both instances, this image should indicate pleasure to some degree, either through orgasm or the end of mutilation. Yet, Williams has chosen to describe it as hopeless. For her purposes, the money shot is hopeless because it points back to the male gaze. I would suggest that the mutilated wound-image in movement shares the hopelessness of the money shot

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[75] To provide a suspense narrative parallel we could consider any number of films but, as it has already proven so influential to the films of this thesis, I will turn again to Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) where, after the climax of finding Mother's corpse and Norman Bates dressed in her clothes, the psychiatrist delivers a concluding monologue that succinctly ties up any loose ends and answers any questions that may still linger. For Carroll, in *The Philosophy of Horror,* it is this part of any suspense narrative that serves as a pay-off for the horror, displeasure and disgust that has previously occurred (1990: 193). However, Carroll's theory is dependent on what the conclusion ultimately is. In 'The Lived Nightmare,' Cowie calls this a positive pleasure in horror, whereas Cowie argues that the pleasure is dependent on a previous unpleasure in order for a change to be recognised. This is, she states, a cognitivist Freudian theory where the pleasure is not in the answer but in the answering (2003: 29).Carroll's theory of pleasure in horror does not account for the function of the mutilated wound-image in movement in the assault narrative sequence whereas Cowie's argument allows us to consider the pleasurable potential in watching torture scenes.

as it points towards an ending of a particular engagement between viewer and film that is also tied up with notions of the masterful gaze. After the (perhaps unnerving) exhilaration of anticipation and mutilation, and the confusion of subject and other, viewer and film, the return to the body as spectacle brings with it, I suggest, a tone of despair that is finally (dis)embodied by the mutilated wound-image in stasis.

Although the mutilated wound-image in movement is part of the aftermath of mutilation, it is still recognisable as, and therefore representative of, a subject – a self that expels the other – albeit it is an identification that is in the process of redrawing the line between viewer and film. However, the mutilated wound-image in stasis is no longer in the realm of the subject; rather, it is the object that is held within the gaze. The mutilated wound-image in stasis is a finger severed, a foot dismembered, a torso decapitated. It is the parts of the body that lie exhausted of life, movement and narrative. This image litters *Hostel* and *Saw II – 3D*: from notable examples that point to significant characters, such as Paxton's fingers and Dr. Gordon's foot (*Saw II* and *Saw III*), to a proliferation of fragments without history, such as the piles of limbs and extremities destined for the incinerator (*Hostel*). Whether they look back to a character and their narrative trajectory or not, the defining feature of the mutilated wound-image in stasis is its overwhelming sense of an ending. Unlike its precedent in movement, which signals an ending through revelation, the mutilated wound-image in stasis reveals nothing, and conceals nothing. It is flat, empty and entirely void of a future *(see fig 2.8)*. More so than any other aspect of the physical mutilation film, this image interrogates the limitations of the flesh.
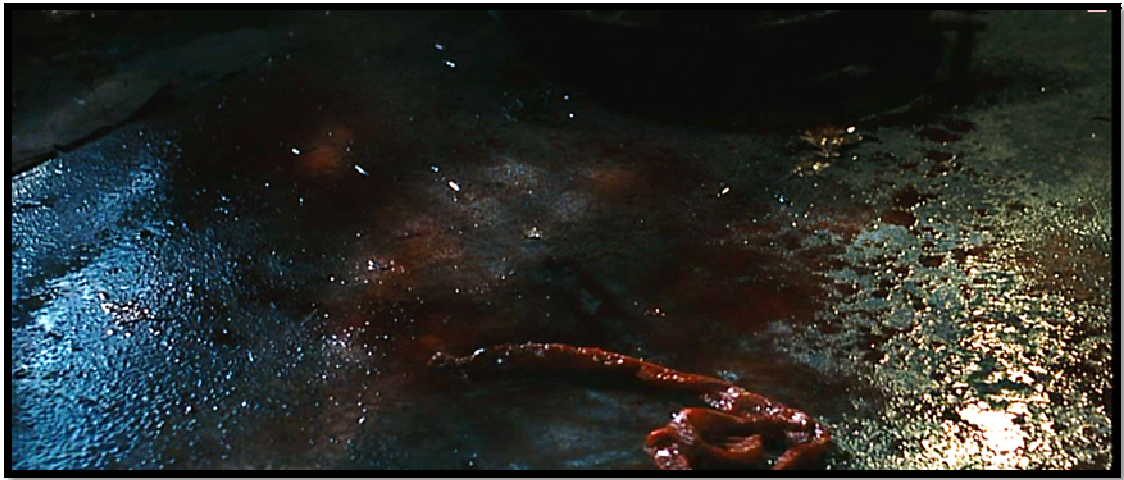
Figure 2.8: *Saw V*: **The mutilated wound-image in stasis, flat empty and void of a future; it reveals nothing and conceals nothing.**

The mutilated wound-image in stasis cannot be expelled because it is that which has already been expelled. This image is overly present – it cannot revert back to the body intact and it signifies an uncertain, if non-existent, future. It is the waste of the physical mutilation film, it is all that is left (the dead family in *Srpski Film*, the mutilated triple in *The Human Centipede: First Sequence* (Tom Six, 2009), the tortured girls in *Martyrs* (Pascal Laugier, 2008), the eviscerated mother in *À l'intérieur*, the fragmented Esther in *Dans Ma Peau*, the mutilated couple in *Antichrist* (Lars von Trier, 2009), the disfigured attendees of a self-help group in *Saw VII*, and the masses of body parts sent to the incinerator in *Hostel*). The mutilated wound-image in stasis could be considered a by-product, if it were not so often the focus of the shot. The icon of the physical mutilation film, this image points to an absence of anything beyond flesh, bones, blood and viscera. The fragmented left-overs of humanity, the mutilated wound-image in stasis points to nothing bar its own physicality.

The props that help form the image are themselves a point of fascination outside the world of the film; special featurettes offered as DVD extras attest to this curiosity regarding the life-like creation of limbs and innards. Whether they are truly lifelike, and the implications of this particular notion of reality, are up for debate; however this is not the most crucial aspect when considering the significance of these gruesome special effects. In his article focusing on grisly surgical scenes in film, 'Vile Bodies and Bad Medicine', Pete Boss suggests that '[w]hat seems to be more important is that they [representations of muscle, sinew, and bones] are recognisable signifiers of the subject's demonstrable physical limitations' (1986: 115-116). For the context Boss has chosen to emphasise, physical limitations lie in the fact that in the fight between life and death, and health and illness, the question of whether the heart keeps beating and the lungs keep inflating is the deciding factor. But what do physical limitations mean for the mutilation film?

For the mutilation film, embodiment is the limit of existence i.e. without embodiment, there is no mode of being. *Hostel* and *Saw II – 3D* are not concerned with the supernatural, that is, ghosts and entities that signify an existence beyond the fleshy corporeality of the body. In his book *The Philosophy of Horror,* Noel Carroll reflects on the parallel emergence of the horror genre that he presupposes came about 'around the middle of the eighteenth century', and the period that 'cultural historians call the "Enlightenment" or "The Age of Reason"' (1990: 55). His tentative point lies in an essential difference between the genre and cultural movement. He states that 'where the Enlightenment convert strives for a naturalistic conception of the world, the horror novel presumes, for the purposes of fiction, the existence of the supernatural' (56). The implication here, however speculative, is that

the horror genre filled the gap that the Enlightenment created.[76] With classic monsters such as Dracula, Frankenstein and the Mummy, the history of horror film has strongly engaged with the supernatural. Since the 1960s, however, and the release of Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) and Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* (1960),[77] non-supernatural horror films have gained popularity and proliferation. These films, either directly or indirectly, focus on the (im)morality of humanity rather than religious conceptions of good and evil.[78] They also often limit existence to the confines of the flesh.

The mutilated wound-image in stasis highlights the significant difference between notions of embodiment and 'the body'. In the introduction to this thesis I drew on Vivian Sobchack's work, *Carnal Thoughts,* where she argues that there is 'extensive contemporary literature' in the humanities that focuses 'objectively (but sometimes superficially) on "the body"' (2004: 2). Thus Sobchack refers to the way the body is often thought about in an abstracted fashion, that which always belongs to someone else other than me. Instead, Sobchack draws on phenomenology to focus on the lived body, that is, on 'what it means to be "embodied"' (2004: 1). To be embodied,

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[76] This theory only works if the definition of horror excludes anything that does not engage with the supernatural; for Carroll in 1990, this was indeed the case.

[77] Although *Peeping Tom* suffered a large amount of controversy on release, it was able to gain a cult following, which included Martin Scorsese as a fan, and is now a critically acclaimed film.

[78] There are, however, a number of religious allegories throughout the *Saw* films. The numerous traps and puzzles that are endured and 'played' by various victims throughout all of the films are the ideas of the serial killer Jigsaw, aka John Kramer. However, he does not accept his reputation as a serial killer, as he insists that his victims are given a choice, and if they die it was because they chose death over life. In his attempt to save humankind from itself, Jigsaw takes on a Messiah-like persona, an image that is further impressed upon by his hooded robe, continued existence after his own death and tendency to give long, sermon-like monologues on the nature of humanity. Of course, his inclination towards torture, maiming and death, and to putting people through such traumatic and distressing experiences from which they are hypothetically meant to be born anew with a different perspective on life, makes him a kind of Antichrist, hence his robe is black.

Sobchack explains, is to be an objective *subject* and a subjective *object* – 'sentient, sensual, and sensible' (2004: 2). The blurred boundary of subject/object defined by sensuality and embodiment that Sobchack is concerned with is nowhere more evident than in the process of mutilation, and the modes of spectatorship it constructs. Limbs and innards, however, signify the abstract body that is always someone else's. There is something about these detached body parts that create a distance between viewer and film; they do not constitute the viewer's corporeality, nor are they embodied. In contrast to the questions asked of the process of mutilation, and the mutilated wound-image in movement, here I aim to explore how, seemingly paradoxically, such a proliferation of body parts constitute a distance and a *dis*embodiment, that is, a disengagement from embodied identifications.

As stated above, the mutilated wound-image in stasis is familiar. It constitutes a particularly common currency within and throughout the physical mutilation film. Repetition and proliferation potentially weakens any visceral impact the image may have, as opposed to the process of mutilation which, partly due to its relative scarcity, retains an unrivalled intensity. In *Hostel*, body parts pile up on trolleys, tables and worktops; they are thrown into incinerators and swept down drains. In one instance, they are even used for comic effect: when a hand wedges itself under the wheel of a trolley, the butcher bends down to pick it up and Paxton, who is lying amongst the dead bodies, is then in danger of being discovered. This tension, coupled with the mixture of the mundane (a cumbersome trolley) and the peculiar (the severed hand), creates an uneasy humour. In *Saw II – 3D,* numerous crime scene photographs exhibiting Jigsaw's work not only highlight the image's two-dimensional bearing, but also relegate it to a sphere of evidence that is coldly

scrutinised and rationalised by detectives. Further to this, more often than not, characters must promptly tear themselves away from their own body parts (emotionally and literally) to save their own, or someone else's, life. The mutilated wound-image in stasis is perhaps not expendable in itself – as it is often an integral part of the physical mutilation film – however, it does point to a certain disposability of the body.

The mutilated wound-image in stasis signals a loss, not only for bodies on-screen but the embodiment of the viewer as it is constituted by the film. Although the visceral engagement is potentially intensely uncomfortable, it is an engagement that is, to some degree, desired. In the previous chapter, I drew on Elizabeth Cowie's understanding of a Freudian theory of pleasure to argue that mutilation that is anticipated, is also desired, as it promises the satisfaction of the cessation of unpleasure.[79] Similarly, whether an engagement between viewer and film is pleasurable or unpleasurable, the connection itself covers a lack through a system of looks that constructs embodied identifications. Certain filmic elements, such as the shot/reverse-shot editing technique, allow the spectator to reassume the relationship within film that has been threatened by the limitations of the screen.[80] As uncomfortable as it may be, the process of mutilation also serves to cover this threat, whereas the mutilated wound-image in stasis does not.

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[79] See Cowie, 'The Lived Nightmare,' 2003 (29) where she argues that it is the recognisable change in the subject that creates satisfaction; as such, pleasure is dependent on a previous unpleasure. I suggest this may be extended to engagements between viewer and film – the engagement itself is desired, regardless of whether we may have cause to deem the connection pleasurable or otherwise.

[80] See Stephen Heath, 'Notes on Suture,' (1977), where he argues that the identification of suture should not be restricted to the shot/reverse-shot formation, rather 'suture is a multiple functioning of the discursive organisation of any given classical cinema film' (66). The process of mutilation is not always a shot/reverse-shot formation proper; however, the link that is created between the gaze and mutilation (see Chapter One) forms a strong tie between spectator and film.

A man is tied to a table, his arms stretched out beside him, his hands encased in vices. Above him hangs a large pendulum blade. A video message informs him that, in order to escape, he must crush his hands in the vices provided. The man hesitates before completing the agonizing task, yet the pendulum continues to fall, slicing through his abdomen again and again until, finally, his screams fall silent, his eyes fade into a glass-like stare and the camera slowly retreats as the screen fades into black.[81] Before his death, his strained movements and desperate screams tied the mutilating flesh to a mode of embodiment, and injected life into faceless and inanimate flesh (the prosthetic torso). Without this sound and motion, the link between flesh and embodiment is disrupted, the wound no longer returns the gaze and it is no longer tied to an embodied subject. With this opening scene, *Saw V* offers the mutilated wound-image in stasis as a representation of a crisis of self, both for the characters on screen and for the spectator that is defined by a loss, either of limbs, or of the imaginary relationship with film. This spectatorship, I argue, resonates in the body of the viewer as intense physical responses, that recalled them back to notions of a corporeal state, subside. This is further articulated in the narratives of the films studied in this chapter, in particular through the character of Kana (*Hostel*) and the small number of survivors in *Saw II – 3D*.

A survivor of Jigsaw's games, Amanda, becomes the killer's protégé after declaring he saved her life from drugs, depression and self-harm. Ultimately, it is revealed that

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[81] Although Jigsaw always provides his victims with a means of escape (as long as they complete whatever is asked of them), this was a copycat murder. Detective Mark Hoffman, who has been on the Jigsaw case since the beginning, takes revenge for his sister's brutal killing by ensnaring her murderer in this trap with no means to escape.

Amanda still suffers from self-harm and, in spite of caring for him deeply, has long since lost faith in her teacher and saviour. One character in *Saw 3D: The Final Chapter,* Bobby Dagen, is able to achieve something positive out of his meeting with Jigsaw, and leads a survival group for others who have come through to the other side intact. However, he is a hoaxer who makes his own story up for the very motivations Jigsaw would abhor – fame and money.[82] The fact that he is an imposter undermines the potential for his scars to be symbols of achievement, as does the arrival of Simone, a victim of *Saw VI*. Simone's thoughts on what she has endured, and the physical price she has had to pay, speak to the potential despair that is represented by the mutilated wound-image in stasis.

The camera follows a young woman at waist level as she approaches the circle of self-helpers. Most of her body is cast in shadow; however, her hand gleams in reflected light as it hangs by her side *(see fig 2.9).* As she sits down, a close-up omits her face from the frame and reveals her picking up her left arm and positioning it onto her lap. What was not immediately apparent in the first shot is glaringly obvious here: her arm is a prosthetic, its close resemblance of human flesh made

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[82] Jigsaw began this game as a result of facing his own mortality and consequent despair. His wife suffers a miscarriage, thus denying Kramer the chance of continuing his familial line, and he is diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumour. After driving his car off a cliff and surviving, in spite of being impaled by a metal rod in his side, he realises that life is something not to be taken for granted and embarks on a quest to cure anyone who suffers apathy towards their own lives, no matter how this may materialise, for example – drug use, depression, adultery, prostitution, petty crime, and career choices Kramer takes a particular dislike to, such as private investigators and insurance salespeople. What is revealed more and more with each film, however, is his distaste for physical pleasures and base desires, thus his attacks on people whose lives revolve around sex, mind-altering substances and financial gain. The appreciation of, and respect for, life is paramount and should figure above such primal cravings that are often founded in the body. Jigsaw, then, is very critical of the limits of physicality and materiality. He reasons that these should not be humanity's parameters; rather, the people in the *Saw* franchise should seek to transcend these restrictions to find an abstract notion of an appreciation of life, a form of salvation that cannot be named.

eerie through its inanimate nature *(see fig 2.10).* The plasticity of the fake limb is glaring; it won't age, wrinkle, scar, or degrade in the same way as flesh. It is a constant reminder of the fallibility of the human body, and in this Simone despairs. As evidenced through her incensed responses to the group's survivalist messages, for her, the wound signifies nothing. In contrast to others who seek to find some meaning in their ordeals, Simone reduces her experiences to her corporal limitations.

Figure 2.9 *Saw 3D*: Simone's left hand appears strange in its eerie stillness.

Figure 2.10 *Saw 3D*: For Simone, her injury signifies nothing and she reduces her experience to her corporal horizons.

Although *Hostel* does not share the same overt preoccupations with the virtue of existence that underscore the *Saw* franchise, the character of Kana, who has her mutilated eye severed for her by Paxton,[83] similarly despairs in her own disfigurement. Her mutilated wound-image in movement, that pushes the spectator from the position of subject/object to ocular-specular, is the severed optical nerve that oozes pus. As with Paxton's fingers, this mutilation occurs before (and serves as a catalyst for) her potential for escape, again paralleling the expulsion of the spectator from the double bind of the sadistic-masochistic gaze with the escape from torture and death. Immediately after this, the film enters its final chase as Paxton and Kana both race to the train station in what will eventually transpire as a futile effort to avoid the global hunting group run by the world's richest and most powerful elite.[84] While on the platform, Kana catches sight of herself in a pane of glass. Gazing at herself, she is transfixed by her own flesh, deaf to Paxton's warnings that

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[83] See Chapter One for an analysis of this scene.
[84] Paxton survives this film, but dies in the opening of the sequel.

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they are about to be caught. As Kana did not know the extent of her wounds before this point, by gazing upon herself they are made evident to her – in essence, she plays an active part in her own mutilation by turning the gaze upon herself *(see fig 2.11)*. In despair at her appearance, she throws herself in front of an oncoming train, her blood spraying in the faces of stunned passengers. Although her action could be read as a form of narcissism, it also reflects the despair vocalised by Simone in *Saw 3D,* a despair that arises from a fixation with the flesh – an obsession with looking at the body until the body disintegrates under the force of the gaze, and nothing is left except objects that signify what was once the self.

The mutilated wound-image in stasis signals the end to an overwhelming rollercoaster of complex spectatorial shifts in a relatively short period of time. In her book, *Representing the Woman,* Elizabeth Cowie suggests that shifts in identification form part of the pleasures of film-viewing (1997: 12). Thus, one of the ways these films may be enjoyed is through the exhilaration created by the movement of the torture sequence. It may also lend itself to a masochist reading; in her book, *In the Realm of Pleasure,* Gaylyn Studlar argues that shifts in identification provide a freedom and pleasure that directly relates 'to the use of masochism to develop a theory of bisexual response' (1988: 35). Not only do these films construct a masochistic spectatorship (over the more popular idea that they are sadistic), they also potentially cut through the gender divide, inhibiting the polarisation of male and female and, instead, 'satisfy the drive to be both sexes' (1988: 35). This further connects the mutilation film (particularly those analysed in the first two chapters of this thesis) with the slasher film, which has also been criticised for being sadistic and misogynistic, before a masochist approach suggested that notions of gendered

spectatorship should be understood as being far more complex than what was previously allowed for.[85]

Figure 2.11 *Hostel*: **The body disintegrates through a fixation with the flesh.**

The presence of the mutilated wound-image in stasis permeates all of the films; it is a constant presence, a perpetual reminder, a truth lurking in the background of increasingly complex plots that cuts across all character and narrative concerns. It also represents an ending – both of the assault sequence of narrative, and of the subject. It constructs a temporary stasis both within the film, and in the fluctuations of spectatorial positions. In her book *Death 24x a Second,* Laura Mulvey suggests

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[85] I use the term 'slasher film' in accordance with Carol Clover, who appoints Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) as the ancestor, but suggests a second phase to the sub-genre evolved between 1974 and 1986 (bookended by the first and second *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* films, both directed by Tobe Hooper) (1992: 23-26). Clover's argument is that the male spectator identifies with the 'final girl' (an archetypal character of the slasher film, a female victim-hero who survives either by escaping or fighting back) who is in various ways androgenised, suggesting that there is a level of excitement 'predicated on the decidability or both-andness or one-sexness of the construction' (217) of spectatorship.

that, in narratives, both beginnings and ends are 'characterized by stasis', and that the stasis of endings signals the desire to return to an '"earlier" state' (2006: 70);

> the movement of camera and character carry forward and energize the story; from shots to sequences through the linking process of editing. But at the end, the aesthetics of stillness returns to both narrative and the cinema (2006: 70).

Hostel and *Saw II – 3D* capitalise on, and relentlessly repeat this filmic structure. Torture scenes are characterised by their frenetic energy, as has been discussed in this chapter and the previous, and the editing that constructs the system of looks that generates the embodied identification between viewer and film is juxtaposed by the deathly stasis of the dismembered body part. The return to an earlier state that Mulvey refers to relates not only to aesthetics but to the mode of spectatorship, from an interrogation and blurring of viewer/spectator concepts to a reaffirmation of subject/object, viewer/film.

Returning to an ocular-specular spectatorship, the mutilated wound-image in stasis is held as the object of the gaze. A spectatorship that is characterised as creating close ties within the text, while keeping its distance, has returned to the state of the beginning, not only in (lack of) movement but also (lack of) proximity. And yet, there is a left over physicality; the mutilated wound-image in stasis may not be able to drive the assault sequence forward because it signifies the end, however it can look to the next body, the next victim that will become nothing more than an object of the flesh. Here, once more, even in the most nihilistic of images, a disavowal of mortality is made possible. *Hostel* and *Saw II – 3D* have repeatedly collapsed the

distance between viewer and screen and made tangible the illusion of torture. Such a visceral intensity that engaged the viewer and subverted the hierarchy of subject/object throughout the assault leaves its mark in the promise to return.

Chapter Three: Affective Sounds

'whatever virtues sound brings to the film are largely perceived and appreciated by the audience in visual terms – the better the sound, the better the image' (Murch, 1994: viii)

This chapter focuses on a number of mutilation films that subvert the dominance of the image in cinema. Although there are few focused studies on the horror film soundtrack,[86] it is well accepted amongst fans and aficionados that sound is essential for the generation of anxiety.[87] The following two chapters explore how sound has been used and experimented with in various films to create a powerful and sustained physicality, thereby questioning and challenging the assumed hierarchy that is

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[86] There are some however. For example, see Philip Hayward, *Terror Tracks,* (2009); this edited collection focuses on post-World War II horror soundtracks and covers a range of scores from orchestral to electronic; and Neil Lerner, *Listening to Fear* (2010); this edited collection covers films from *Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* to more contemporary horror such as *The Sixth Sense* (M. Night Shyamalan, 1999) and *The Others* (Alejandro Amenábar, 2001). Both these collections focus on the ways music and sound create and intensify fearful responses to horror cinema. See also Chapter Six in Peter Hutchings, *The Horror Film,* (2004) who considers a wide range of films to analyse the function of sound and music to make meaning in the horror film. He also directs attention towards the non-subservient use of sound in place of 'showing' the monster, which is a technique I will be emphasising in this chapter (pp127-147).

[87] See for example, horror fan John Hübinette's undated online essay 'Music and Sound Effects in Horror Films' or various horror film fan sites that have threads and/or forums and shops specifically dedicated to sound in horror such as: *Horror Movie Fan* http://www.angelfire.com/film/horrormoviefan/; *Horror Movie Fans* www.horrormoviefans.com; and *Horror Fan Zine* www.horrorfanzine.com All last accessed 08.03.2013. It is a little peculiar that, although sound and music in horror is so widely understood and appreciated by fans of horror, there is little scholarly work on the subject. It could be the case that the potential for sound to create fear and tension is taken for granted and too easily explained away with scientific accounts. For example, Noel Carroll refers to psychologists (although does not reference any specific studies) who have suggested it is a human tendency to jump at loud noises, in other words, we are 'hardwired' to do so ('Prospects for Film Theory,' 1996: 50). It is, for Carroll, seemingly satisfactory to simply be aware of this response whereas, as film scholar Cosimo Urbano points out in his article 'What's the Matter with Melanie?' (2004), it explains very little, to the degree it is not even clear what, in fact, is being explained (22). Urbano is more interested in the question of why a viewer would put her/himself in that position rather than how the sound causes them to jump. Although I am also interested in the question of why so many (including myself) choose to repeatedly view horror and physical mutilation films, at stake here is the many and varied nuanced ways sound and music generate particular responses which, I suggest, are too frequently ignored for the sake of simply stating some music is 'eerie' and some sounds make us jump. I would argue that the ways in which sound may generate physical and affective responses is far more complex than some biological hardwired response and hope to demonstrate as such in this chapter and the next.

highlighted in the above opening quote – that sound functions only to enhance the image.

Dismembered limbs, severed heads and exposed bowels are iconic images for films well-known for constructing fearful and anxious spectatorship; it is equally accepted that sound effects increase the precision and effectiveness of these visuals. As was explored in Chapter One, *Hostel* (Eli Roth, 2005) and *Saw II – 3D* (Darren Lynn Bousman, 2005, 2006, 2007, David Hackl, 2008, Kevin Greutert, 2009, 2010) follow on from the trend of violent and sometimes banned films from the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s (from directors such as Lucio Fulci, Umberto Lenzi, Ruggero Deadato, Jörg Buttgereit and Herschell Gordon Lewis) by supplementing the image with the expected accompanied sound. The texture of glistening intestinal membranes is made more tactile by the squelches on the soundtrack. The pain of a scalp slowly torn from a skull is enhanced by an abrasive ripping sound effect. The image, therefore, is often dominant as it lays the foundation of a physical construct on which the soundtrack continues to build.

In contrast to the cultural dominance of visuality,[88] some theorists have suggested that sound has the greater potential to construct physicality. As Anthony Storr states

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[88] Robert Jütte, in *History of the Senses,* argues that the hierarchy of the senses is a cultural construction as well as a 'product of the phylogenetic development of the human species' and technological changes. The hierarchy where sight is dominant is, he states, 'classical' and originates with Aristotle (to the extent it is on his authority that we have only five senses), although this hierarchy has never gone altogether undisputed (2005: 61). Constance Classen also writes, in *Worlds of Sense*, that sight as dominant is a 'standard' ranking given authority by Aristotle, although not entirely constant (1993: 3). Although far from concrete, this hierarchy has been inadvertently articulated through the privileging of the image in film studies for many decades before sound was considered important enough to be the main focus of study. Early writers on the topic who helped draw attention towards the significance of sound and music in cinema include Michel Chion (*The*

in *Music and the Mind*, it is not possible to dispel sound as easily as the image; the latter can quickly be shut out with closed eyes (1992: 100-01). The image, therefore, presents a clearer and more precise boundary between viewer and film. Similarly, in 'The Sound of Silence,' Reni Celeste, identifies the interior and invasive nature of sound as it 'seems to originate from within. Vision presents the world at a distance, as outside your body, whereas sound penetrates into your body' (2005: 115). A focus on sound, then, is pivotal for an exploration into the ways the physical mutilation film blurs the notion of film as object and viewer as body in the theatre. Kim Cascone's analysis of the soundscapes created by David Lynch and Andrey Tarkovsky inspires the same notion of interiority with a description of them as a 'viral contagion' with an ability to 'infect' ('Viral Space,' 2003: 1). With an emphasis on viruses and disease the implication is that, while sound may penetrate the body, it is essentially alien and threatening to the self. Such an inference, I would suggest, comes from the disturbing tendency of sound to probe and subvert the hierarchy of viewer as subject and film as object. This chapter and the next explore how particular physical mutilation films utilise sound to generate certain physical responses that threaten the notion of viewer as separate to and outside the text.

Understood only in visual terms, as a supplement to the image, sound might seem to have no physical qualities of its own. However, that sound can cross the senses towards touch has been recognised by perhaps the most influential writer on sound and cinema, Michel Chion in his book *Film: A Sound Art*; 'I call *tran-sensory* those

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Voice in Cinema, 1994, *Audio-Vision,* 1994, *Film: A Sound-Art,* 2009), John Belton and Elizabeth Weis (*Film Sound,* 1985), and Claudia Gorbman (*Unheard Melodies,* 1987, who also translated a number of Chion's works). Studies of cinema can also aid an understanding of cultural differences relating to the hierarchy of the senses, as Laura Marks shows through her study of intercultural cinema, *The Skin of the Film* (2000) where touch is a ubiquitous and poignant sense stimulated in order to create meaning and memory.

perceptions that belong to no one particular sense but that may travel via one sensory channel or another without their content or their effect being limited to this one sense' (2009: 496, original emphasis). In this statement, Chion is freeing embodied modes of existence from singular concrete objects i.e. when we talk about the effectiveness of sound, the discussion is not restricted to the sense of hearing. Nor must we assume that how sound is perceived *originates* with the sense of hearing. In Chapters One and Two I explored how the image is understood through the sense of touch as the viewer's corporeality is mimetic of the mutilation on-screen.[89] This chapter continues to analyse film's potential to both connect and traverse the senses with an emphasis on sound. I will focus on one film in particular – *Dans Ma Peau* (Marina de Van, 2002) to question what ways do sound construct physicality that is not dependent on or merely an accompaniment to the image? How might sound be considered affective? How does the physical nature of sound interrogate the notions of spectator and viewer and threaten the fragile instability of film spectatorship?

Marina De Van's *Dans Ma Peau* (2002) won an award at the Fant-Asia Film Festival in 2003 for Best International film, in spite of audience reactions at the Edinburgh Film Festival 2003 where, according to film critic Peter Bradshaw writing for the *Guardian*, the film 'had people staggering for the aisles … hands clamped over mouths, cheeks ballooning' (2003). The most striking aspect of this film isn't that it won an award or caused a mass walk-out, but that there is something about it that resulted in both the highest of praise and the lowest of criticism. The disparate

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[89] This argument principally assumes the origins of corporeal mimicry lie in the sense of seeing, that is, the forceful effectiveness of the image traverses the senses from sight to touch. In Chapter Five I will be exploring the potential for the physical mutilation film to subvert this hierarchy and generate an embodied perception of the image that does not necessarily originate in the sense of sight.

reception of *Dans Ma Peau* would continue within critical circles and academic debates.[90]

It is undoubtedly the themes *Dans Ma Peau* engages with that have sparked off such mass debate and controversy. With representations of self-harm and self-cannibalism, *Dans Ma Peau* is indeed a difficult film to sit through. With such violent subject matter, it is unsurprising that *Dans Ma Peau* is considered by a number of theorists to be situated in a recent cinematic phenomenon labelled *cinema du corps* (Tim Palmer, 2006) and the New French Extreme (James Quandt, 2004). For Palmer, the 'agenda' of these films (others include *Trouble Every Day* (Claire Denis, 2001)*, Demonlover* (Olivier Assayas, 2002)*, Irréversible* (Gaspar Noé, 2002) and *Twentynine Palms* (Bruno Dumont, 2003)) 'is an on-screen interrogation of physicality' (2006: 171). This is, I would argue, the preoccupation with all physical mutilation films, not just those emerging from France. Where de Van's film stands out and differs from the films that were the focus of the first and second chapter, however, is that it is not a graphic fascination with the look of mutilated flesh that alerts us to its 'on-screen interrogation of physicality'. Instead, with the use of split-screens, point-of-view shots that reveal the blurred and unstable vision the protagonist has of the world around her, and textured sounds (such as ragged breathing and ripping skin), along with the *suggestion* of mutilated skin rather than

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[90] Film scholar Tim Palmer thinks critically and analytically about *Dans ma Peau,* placing it in a contemporary phenomenon he terms cinéma du corps (cinema of the body) (2006, 2007). Film scholar Carrie Tarr considers it to be an 'impressive' film and carefully analyses its aesthetics to argue the film artfully engages both male and female spectators (2006). However, scholar James Quandt considers it to be 'occasionally gruesome and unbearably intense,' and describes the film's director and lead actor, Marina de Van, as ashen and impassive (2004: 128); and film critic Stuart Jeffries, after meeting with the director, remarks that 'in the flesh, Marina de Van is as blankly feral as her character in the film' and suggests to her 'you're a self-absorbed woman who has made a sickening film' (2004). See also Palmer, 'Style and Sensation' 2006, where he provides a summary for the critical and scholarly reception of the cinéma du corps (pp 26-27).

the clear depiction of flesh being stripped off the body, the film forcefully and aggressively generates a physical response that bridges the theoretical distance between viewer and film.

The protagonist of *Dans Ma Peau*, Esther, seems at first to live a life filled with work, friends, and a loving relationship with her boyfriend Vincent. The couple are planning to move in together, and Esther is making progress in the company she works for. She is a young, attractive, intelligent woman who is on the threshold of success in both personal and professional spheres. In one scene early in the film, at a party, Esther walks out into an unlit garden alone. Stumbling through the dark she falls, and later realises that she has badly injured her leg. This wound precipitates a series of self-inflicted injuries that increase in severity as Esther mutilates and devours her own flesh. This chapter will explore how these actions are an attempt to define herself against others while irreversibly fragmenting, destabilising, and ultimately losing her sense of self. I suggest that, in this way, *Dans Ma Peau* presents the story of Esther's self-harm as a powerful approach to thinking about selfhood that is defined by a physical engagement between the viewer and the film. How this is constituted by the more conventional senses of cinema – sight and sound – will be the focus of this chapter.

From the opening credits, *Dans Ma Peau* hints that the idyllic life described above is not quite what it seems. The film begins by introducing a city that is aesthetically

disjointed.[91] This is done through the use of split-screens, extreme close-ups, and the juxtaposition of photographic positive and negative images, thereby presenting an unstable setting that creates a connection with the typical narrative trajectory of the horror film, with one significant difference. The horror film typically begins by setting up a world with certain structures and boundaries that are about to be threatened by an outside force; here the borders that contain the world in *Dans Ma Peau* are already compromised *(see fig 3.1)*. Although split-screens may present a desire to separate one thing from another, they also anticipate the imagery of split skin that subverts the boundary between inner and outer, and causes them to bleed into one another. In this way, *Dans Ma Peau*, like all mutilation films, engages with the notion of the abject. However, in contrast to the claims film scholar Cynthia Freeland makes regarding the abject – that it is a notion that has become so broad so as to lose meaning (2002: 20) – these films attest to the nuances that can be found in a study of abjection in film. For example, as I have previously argued, *Hostel* and *Saw II – 3D* articulate the anxiety that the body can be reduced to abject matter; here, *Dans Ma Peau* plays with the anxious desire and threat of the subject becoming lost within the abject. As long as the abject is forcibly present, there is a danger of the subject becoming lost in the abject.[92] The imagery of blood and broken flesh shifts the subject into the realm where 'I' no longer exists. This shift parallels Esther's slow deterioration as she loses herself to the abject.[93] Yet the film's introduction suggests that *Dans Ma Peau* begins with a sense of abjection (through fragmentation

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[91] Tarr, in her article 'Director's Cuts,' describes the world presented at the start of the film as 'slightly out of kilter' (2006: 87) that she connects to a double vision, split perception and schizophrenic subjectivity. Both Tarr's study and mine, therefore, make connections with the film's aesthetics and Esther's state of mind.

[92] Cowie refers to the enjoyment of the Other, of which we are in danger of disappearing into, 'jouissance.' She states that anxiety is a defence against this (2003: 32).

[93] *Dans Ma Peau* has, therefore, a linear trajectory of disintegration (similar to mutilations films such as *Irréversible*, *Antichrist* (Lars von Trier, 2009), or *Srpski Film* (Srdjan Spasojevic, 2010) and unlike those for which the visual detail of mutilation is dominant (*Hostel, Saw II – 3D*) where a circuitous trail of anticipation and cessation of unpleasure is favoured).

of the screen) and this threat (continued through fragmentation of the body) is not expelled by the end.
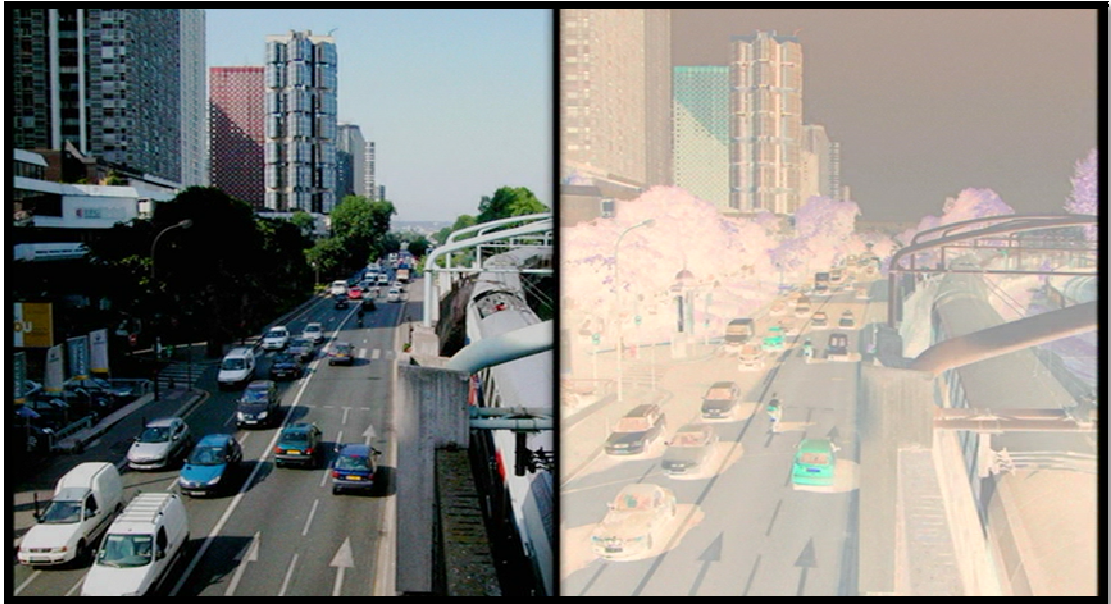
Figure 3.7: *Dans Ma Peau***: Split screens anticipate the imagery of split skin and present a world where something is 'not quite right'.**

Despite the very visual focus of Barbara Creed's study of the abject and the horror film (1993), fragmentation is not represented through the visual alone. In Chapter One, I drew on Laura Marks' work to suggest that the mutilating wound-image is haptic because they are experienced through senses other than sight. In this chapter, I suggest that sound also has a haptic capacity, in that it is felt as well as heard. I am not referring here to extremely low frequencies where the vibrations of sound waves are felt before, or instead of, being heard (see Chapter Four for a discussion on this topic). Rather, I am suggesting that certain sounds have a texture that generates a sense of physicality in the listener. The prominent example in *Dans Ma Peau* is Esther's grating breath that is often placed over scenes of self-harm. The sound of

breathing is haptic because it inspires the sense memory of air moving across the skin and points to the viewer's own corporeality as a breathing subject.

Dans Ma Peau also generates a physical response that I consider to be the affect of anxiety by frequently displacing or separating sound from the image. The anxiety that the sound inspires therefore (such as the ripping of flesh) appears to originate from within the viewing subject, creating a physicality that both defines and interrogates the engagement between viewer and film. In her chapter, 'The Lived Nightmare', film theorist Elizabeth Cowie uses psychoanalytic theories of anxiety and trauma to explore different ways an audience is moved by the horror film. Cowie distinguishes emotion from affect by arguing the former comes from *aesthesis*, that is, knowledge that comes from the senses together with bodily sensations and/or responses. An example is the fear response during, for instance, the famous transformation film in *An American Werewolf in London* where each change (the growing hair, the stretching hands, the prominent spine) is painstakingly scrutinised (John Landis, 1981). For Cowie, this would potentially be an emotional response. In contrast, affect recognises how this response can become detached from the object (2003:30). As a result, anxiety is always 'unreasonable', 'excessive', and 'inappropriate' 'because it exceeds the response proper to the circumstance, or because it is experienced even where there is ostensibly no cause for fear or its anticipation' (30). What Cowie describes here could be related to the responses generated by any horror film, including the example given above. One of the oft asked questions of horror is why we experience anxiety or fear when we know there

is nothing actually threatening us.[94] Therefore, our responses are always going to be excessive and inappropriate while watching a horror film. What *Dans Ma Peau* does is extend the unreasonable nature of the response by removing the object (the image) of horror, potentially intensifying the anxiety felt and displacing it from the film and onto the self.[95]

The film begins with a series of shots of a city that, through the use of stills, has been brought to a standstill. Cars and people are suspended in their commute along busy highways and crowded escalators. Isolated roofs of office blocks are set against a blue and white sky that is neither bright nor dull. Each of these shots lead into one another through a slow dissolve, and the pace is set by a steady repetition of chords, on top of which plays a gentle and calming melody. The overall effect is of a city that is winding down, at rest from what would normally present a lively scene. In the midst of all this, Esther is introduced. Her presence is indicated before her character is shown, via a soft but abrasive sound that is matched by the image of her writing. Her character is presented as separate to the calm of the city shots that precede her.

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[94] In his book *Philosophy of Horror,* Noël Carroll provides a detailed and comprehensive overview to the approaches to this paradox. He begins with a thought experiment that contests the theory that we, as human beings, are naturally and generally emotionally moved by the situations of other people – if we were told a sad story, on being told that it was all a lie, presumably this would relieve our feelings of sorrow. Therefore, he concludes, there is a link between belief and emotions, which furthers the problem of why we feel something towards fictional films. After considering and critiquing the illusion theory of fiction (where we do actually believe what is happening), the pretend theory of fictional response (where we only pretend to feel anything towards fiction), he posits and favours the thought theory of emotional responses to fictions (belief is *not* actually necessary for an emotional response). He states that there are drawbacks to this theory that 'may raise fundamental philosophical quandaries for some' (1990: 87) it is preferable to the idea that audiences make up their emotions or actually believe in fictional monsters. Although this thesis does not propose to provide an answer to the dilemma of why things are felt towards works of fiction (that we know to be fiction), considering ways in which film engages the viewer, not only with text, but with their own corporeality, could potentially add to ongoing debates in this area.

[95] In this, *Dans Ma Peau* has something in common with horror films such as Robert Wise's *The Haunting* (1963)*,* which capitalise on the power of suggestion. Where it differs from such films, however, is through its preoccupation with mutilated flesh rather than a threatening and supernatural presence.

During her brief interaction with Vincent she barely takes her eyes off her studies. The pace of her work is mentioned, and it is implied she will be working all night while the rest of the city sleeps. The discord between Esther and the outside world anticipates her future actions as her self-harm is read as an attempt, in part, to communicate, and to connect, to a world outside of herself.

The cinematography of the prologue and the opening credits create a metonym for the journey Esther will embark on throughout the course of the film. The city shots are presented in split-screens that depict two images that are always related to one another in some way. Often the same image is shown from a different angle, whereas other shots are more loosely connected e.g. one depicts the exterior of an office block while the other shows a perspective from the inside of a building. Always the right image is a negative to the left. This introduces a juxtaposition of aesthetics: clean, hard lines and blurred, less focused ones that lead Carrie Tarr to consider that sexual difference may be an issue in this film (2006: 88). I would suggest that these contrasted images are a metaphor for the spheres Esther must traverse. These spheres may indeed be considered in terms of sexual differences (i.e. the personal and professional spheres). This is further suggested through the narrative as Esther struggles to get a report written for her male boss and she is accused of flirting with a male superior to advance in her job. Her career will become a motivation for her self-harm later on in the film and it is a part of the outside world that she is never able to fully connect to as she is torn between her roles as friend, lover, employee and her relationship with self-harm.

In a style which prefigures the later treatment of Esther's body, the camera explores the exterior of buildings and interior office objects to a point where they can no longer be recognised as anything intelligible. This use of close-ups serve to highlight the distortion that occurs when the desire to become closer to something, to delight in its detail, overrides and fragments the appreciation of the whole. Extending this fragmentation to the human body, the camera continues to examine Esther's skin. In the prologue, during a close up of Esther's calf, the camera tilts up to reveal its superficial imperfections. The lighting does nothing to flatter the skin as goose bumps and stretch marks are apparent. The skin appears abrasive: tough enough to bear the testimony of Esther's life so far. In *Dans Ma Peau*, the *feel* of skin and flesh is strained against the overriding sense of looking, as Esther must hide her self-harm from others *(see fig 3.2).* This results in a sensory organ that has been stretched to its limits in regards to its ability to feel, yet it is rendered something impossible to bear witness to.
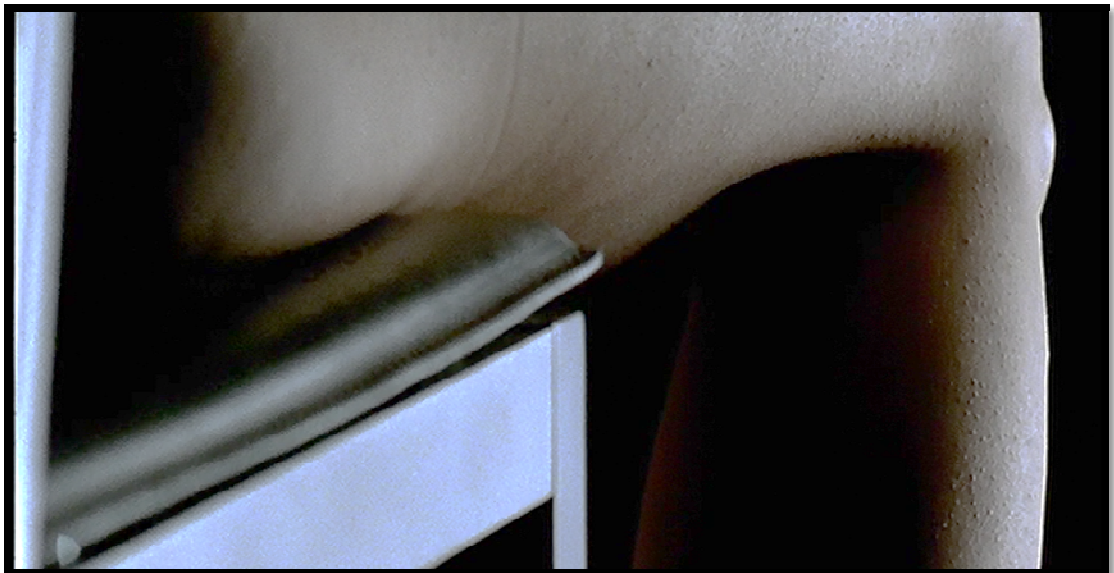
Figure 3.2: *Dans Ma Peau*: **The feel of skin is strained against the overriding sense of looking.**

The representation of self-harm in *Dans Ma Peau* articulates the paradoxical nature of both the act of self-mutilation and the concept of the abject. It can be read as a way for the subject to separate the self from the abject even as it increases the connection. Similarly, if it is used as a form of language it can only ever render the subject incomprehensible. In her article 'Carved in Skin: Bearing Witness to Self Harm,' Jane Kilby describes self-harm as a 'plea...for social recognition' (2001: 124). Although Kilby is analysing personal accounts of people who have suffered with self-harm, *Dans Ma Peau* expresses this argument through its narrative. Esther tells her best friend Sandrine of her first act of self-mutilation, only to be met with confusion and ineffectual attempts of censoring (during one scene where Esther stays at Sandrine's house the latter demands to be allowed into the bathroom with Esther and promptly removes all sharp objects). Here, the 'voice' of self-harm is 'so sheer that it is virtually impossible for anyone to bear witness to' (2001: 124). Kilby references Judith Butler who, in her book *Excitable Speech*, warns against the dangers of speaking in a language that is unintelligible to others, 'not the least of which is the erasure of the subject' (Kilby, 2001: 126);

> If the subject speaks impossibly, speaks in ways that cannot be regarded as speech or as the speech of a subject, then that speech is discounted and the viability of the subject called into question (Butler, 1997: 136).

Butler's argument is played out through Esther's actions of self-harm. Critical to Kilby's article is that self-harm is a language, a mode of communication that has a

voice. However, as is often the case in 'real-life' situations, Esther's self-harm is a paradox as she does all she can to hide it. To be found out could cause her to lose her friendships, her relationship, her career and ultimately herself as a recognised subject. Yet, once she begins to self-harm, this act becomes the only way with which she can both connect (through her own language) and draw a line between herself and others in order to define herself as a subject. As others pull away from her throughout the course of the narrative, the severity of her self-harm increases. Yet it also serves as a constant reminder and eventual cause of her deterioration.

During the scene following the credit sequence, where Esther and Sandrine attend a house party, Esther's fate of exploration, fragmentation and abjection continues to be anticipated. As Esther and Sandrine approach the house, Sandrine points out a man who is a friend of their boss. She tells Esther that it would help her progression through the company if she were to exploit her femininity, only to claim that it was a joke. Yet it introduces the importance of sexual difference and recalls the photographic positive and negative images during the opening credit sequence: for Esther, as a woman, it is an entirely different world in regards to how she perceives, and how she is perceived by others.

The separation of masculinity and femininity is suggested again by the presence of two pictures that Esther observes after she has distanced herself from her friend at the party *(see fig 3.3)*. Both pictures are split down the middle and are captured in such extreme close-up they are impossible to define. The one on the left contains a bright yellow angular structure with sharply defined lines that make it clearly distinct

from the dark and contrasting background. The smaller right hand picture shows pinkish-red cell-like objects, with softer less-well defined borders, the colours of which bleed into the background. They continue the notions of masculinity and femininity begun by the positive and negative split-screens, yet not only are they split from each other, they are split in themselves. Together they represent the ambiguous role Esther has to play in her own self-made horror film.

Figure 3.3: *Dans Ma Peau*: **Pictures continue notions of masculinity and femininity begun by the contrasting split-screens in the credit sequence.**

As both victim and perpetrator of the violence in this film Esther is linked by her self-harm to both Creed's 'monstrous-feminine' (1993) and Carol Clover's 'female victim-hero' (1992). Clover argues that the androgyny of the 'Final Girl' allows for a male masochistic identification – an identification normally reserved for the female spectator. Because Esther is placed in the position of both sadist and masochist, Tarr argues she 'invites recognition on the part of both male and female spectators'

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(2006: 80). The pictures, then, not only represent both roles occupied by Esther but also the role of both male and female spectator, neither of which may escape the fragmentation of the self into subject and object/ perceiver and perceived that occurs from the process of a visceral engagement.

Esther's viability as a subject is called into question three times as a result of her accident. First, her own discovery of her wound suggests that her bodily possession – as defined through the sensuality of flesh – is weak. She only discovers the severe result of her accident when she visits the bathroom some time later *(see fig 3.4)*. Even here she takes herself away from other people to ascend a dark staircase in search of separate facilities. Once she walks across the unlit room to turn on the light, she turns her head slowly and notices something on the floor. The film cuts to reveal marks discernible against the light coloured carpet: footprints stained with blood. The camera shows Esther's point-of-view and follows the footprints away from where she stands, creating a moment of horror for both Esther and the spectator as the possibility arises that someone – or something – is in the room with her. This moment quickly dissipates as the film then cuts back to Esther who follows the trail of footprints with her eyes *back* towards herself as it slowly dawns on her that it was she who made the marks. Through the use of point-of-view shots the film creates an identification with Esther's unawareness and detachment from her sense of self.

The sequence that reveals the extent of Esther's unawareness of her own actions and injury condenses a narrative seen frequently in other films that finally present a clear explanation for on-screen violence with the reveal of a split personality or a ghost

e.g. (*Haute Tension/ Switchblade Romance,* (Alexandre Aja, 2003) *Fight Club* (David Fincher, 1999) *Janghwa, Hongryeon/ A Tale of Two Sisters* (Ji-Woon Kim, 2003) *The Uninvited* (Charles and Thomas Guard, 2009)). Esther's identifications here are split between the 'good' (her personal and professional ambitions, her role as victim-hero) and the 'bad' (her desire to cut, her link to abjection and the monstrous-feminine). As with many films, the 'bad' must be rejected in favour of the self, but Esther cannot proceed down this conventional route. Her subjectivity, that has so far been repeatedly shown as split through split-screens and mise-en-scène, is too fragile to be able to expel the abject: before she can do this she must seek to connect herself to, and define herself from, others, but in doing so she loses herself completely.

Figure 3.4: *Dans Ma Peau*: **Esther only discovers her severe wound when she sees it.**

The threat the abject presents to Esther's bodily possession is reinforced when she is shown visiting her doctor. The doctor does two things of significance for Esther's

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already fragmented state: he questions her, and then he tests her. As the wound is severe and Esther professes to not have felt it right away, the doctor jokingly implies that the leg is not hers. The expression on Esther's face reveals that she has not taken it as the joke it was intended to be. For Esther, the possibility of splitting into multiple parts she cannot contain or possess is both real and horrifying. The doctor then tests Esther's ability to respond correctly to physical stimulation. He pretends to prick her and when she does not react he claims that this was the correct response. Both the question and the test are framed by the doctor's expectations of how she should experience her own body. That he tested her to make sure this leg is indeed hers raises the question of what would have happened had she responded *in*correctly. Would her leg be determined as *not* hers and consequently be taken away? This scene suggests that if the leg *is* hers, it only remains so tentatively, and on the condition that she acts and reacts in the manner expected and accepted by others.

The question of Esther's bodily possession reaches a turning point when her boyfriend discovers her injuries. During a scene where Esther is in the bathroom (a private space) Vincent walks in on her as she is removing her bandages. Later at the breakfast table he, like the doctor before him, questions the normality of her subjectivity as defined through her ability to feel. He also tests her ability to feel: by penetrating her with his fingers he seeks to induce a physical response and he asks her if she can feel it. Although she replies in the negative, because of her physical reaction to the initial penetration it is clear that this reply is not a direct answer to the question, nor is it an attempt to make him stop. After this encounter Esther will begin her own exploration of her body in an attempt to possess it on her own terms. By saying 'no' she is reacting to the attempts of others to question and control her

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bodily experience. The accident triggered in Esther an awareness of her own lack that she situates within her body. It is hers to explore and no-one else's.

A lack represented by an overly present yet absent body (Esther's body is overly present first through the camera's treatment of her naked form and later through her self-harm, yet absent through her inability to feel pain) is a theme that may be seen in other physical mutilation films. For example, the body of the main protagonist in *Srpski Film* (Srdjan Spasojevic, 2010), Milos, is a dominating feature that causes a substantial amount of damage by means of rape and torture. The film constructs close ties with Milos through both narrative (as his return into the porn industry is followed) and visual strategies (such as the use of blurred point-of-view shots and a shaky camera) and is thereby implicated in the atrocities Milos undertakes. However, Milos's culpability is diminished due to the fact he is heavily drugged at the time of committing these acts. This reduced responsibility is replicated for the spectatorial position via the use of flashbacks. A large number of bloody and disturbing images follow each other in quick succession, denoting the sadistic acts of sexual violence that have occurred, yet they are interjected with shots of Milos stumbling through a wooded area that indicate he is only now, days later, (as evidenced by a well-placed radio alarm clock) becoming aware of the carnage that has already taken place. The events are witnessed only as they unfold in Milos' convalescing memory; neither the spectatorial position nor Milos are fully present at the time brutal rape and torture are actually being committed. Thus an overly present and dominant body is in fact absent for both character and spectator. In this gap, physicality, constructed through anxiety-inducing low bass and nauseating and abject images, stands in for the displaced body.

As well as the displacement of her embodiment through her inability to feel, Esther also chooses to detach herself from others. Her rejection of intrusion is indicated through the many scenes where she is shown in private spaces, most notably the bathroom. Shortly after she visits her doctor, Esther is shown in the bath. An high angle shot provides a clear view of Esther's body, which is presented as a whole and in stark lighting – rather than being fragmented by a series of close-ups or obscured and complimented by shadow. Further, although it is frequently shown naked, Esther's body is not sexualised; instead it is sanitised and explored. In his discussion of the films *Trouble Every Day*, *Irréversible*, and *Twentynine Palms,* Palmer describes a recurring motif that is also found in *Dans Ma Peau*; 'we see bodies displayed in emphatically nonsexual ways, repeatedly in the context of cleaning and hygiene: under flat fluorescent lighting in bathrooms, vigorously scrubbed in bathtubs, bathed in sprays from showers' (2006: 31). Palmer mentions this in order to foreground the juxtaposition between two very different styles used in all the films he analyses – one clean, bright and unobscured, the other dark, disjointed and caked in blood – however, at this point in *Dans Ma Peau,* this 'hygienic' aesthetic stands up on its own to present Esther in a process of objectification. As she observes herself, Esther pulls at her skin drawing it away from her body *(see fig 3.5)*. The skin appears false and unnatural as she is able to stretch it so far away from herself. This plasticity of the skin creates a sense of artificiality and inhumanity around Esther's body, as though it were alien to her. The notion of her skin as an alien object is again suggested as Esther is seen perched on the edge of her bath taking off the dressings round her leg. A close-up reveals the bandages to have fused onto her skin *(see fig 3.6)*. These act as a prosthetic skin that has bound itself to Esther, and in doing so

they serve not only to blur the boundary between subject and object, but also to form it. This scene signals the beginning of Esther's attempts to negotiate between the need to contain herself, and the need to remove that which contains her.

The sight of Esther's bandages forming an inhuman, prosthetic skin recalls a striking shot in Roman Polanski's narrative of a young girl's descent into catatonic despair, characterised by her revulsion of the objects that surround her: *Repulsion* (1965). In one telling scene the anti-heroine of the film, Carole, stands in her flat taking off her gloves. As the camera's unbroken gaze on Carole mimics her concentrated attention on the material peeling away from her skin, and retaining the shape of her fingers, there arises a surreal possibility: the glove *is actually her skin*, and she is not removing a superficial object, but instead stripping away a part of herself. Similarly, Esther sheds her bandages, as well as layers of her own skin that have fused to the woven fabric, further raising the question of where her internal self ends, and the external world begins.

Through close-ups of inanimate objects in the opening sequence – such as pens, pencils, and paperclips – and non-subjective shots of Esther's body, *Dans Ma Peau* creates an unstable spectatorship that shifts jarringly between a detached view of Esther's body and an identification with her physicality. As Esther oscillates between observing herself, and seeking to connect to herself in an embodied sense, the spectatorship shifts from ocular-specular, verging on voyeuristic (when she is in the bath) to one that engages with the film through embodiment, thereby calling into question the distinction between viewer and film, while at the same time splitting the

viewer between subject and object, perceiver and perceived. Visual strategies generate fragmentation and de-subjectivity and construct a powerful physicality; how sound in particular continues to build on this will be explored in the analysis of the following scenes.

Figure 3.5: *Dans Ma Peau*: **Esther's skin appears unnatural as she pulls and stretches it.**

The following three scenes show Esther hurting herself significantly, each one increasing in severity. The fact that Esther's self-harm goes from cutting, to tearing off pieces of skin with her teeth, to removing a large section of skin to preserve, indicates the double nature of these actions. The deeper Esther delves into her own flesh to know, own, and define herself, the closer she gets to disintegrating entirely. The potential for these scenes to produce a physical response blurs the boundary between film and viewer. The space that is transgressed between Esther and the viewer serves as a reminder of Esther's gradual 'bleeding out' as subject and other, for both Esther and viewer, become one.

Figure 3.68: *Dans Ma Peau*: Bandages fuse with Esther's skin, both forming and blurring the boundary between her and others.

Esther commits her first act of self-harm in the basement at her work. Before this she is shown to be sitting at her computer, distracted and unable to think of anything to type. The film then cuts to her entering a dimly lit space, little bigger than a corridor, with concrete stairs and walls lined with files. The image is claustrophobic, but the hollow and grating sound of her footsteps serves to create a space around Esther far bigger and more hostile than the mise-en-scène suggests. This technique is evident earlier in the film where particular diegetic sounds are foregrounded to create a distance between Esther and the physical world around her, and to present this physical world as harsh and impenetrable. As she removes her trousers, her crouched foetal position is centrally placed in the one shaft of light coming into the screen *(see fig 3.7)*. The wound on her leg is clearly visible and appears soft, malleable, and very penetrable, unlike her surroundings. As Esther removes her shoe, the tearing sound of its zip placed on top of the image of her gaping and vulnerable flesh anticipates what is to come.

Figure 3.7: *Dans Ma Peau*: **Esther's first episode of self-harm occurs at her work. Her leg appears permeable and vulnerable.**

This is the most detailed mutilated flesh visually presented in this scene. For most of the duration of Esther's self-harm the camera focuses on her face, while the noise of ripping and tearing, this time of flesh (we assume), is played on the soundtrack. This does not undermine the potential for Esther's actions to generate a physical response, however, as the sounds of her tearing her skin and her heavy and grating breath recall the image of flesh. It is a sound-image, like that referred to in Chapter One, however the sound is not finally reconnected to its object – the mutilating wound-image. Apart from the blood that has appeared on her wound between two shots, nothing is seen of the mutilation. The displacement of sound from its object causes the physicality of ripping flesh to arise in the self – the spectatorship constructed in this scene constitutes the body of the viewer through anxiety. In contrast, Esther's searching eyes that look away from the image and appear detached from the sound

signal a loss of her own ability to feel. The film's spectatorship has this lack by generating a physical response that both covers and reaffirms Esther's loss.

Esther's disintegration of self is marked by her failing ability to feel. The film continues to present Esther with more examples of an extreme lack of physical awareness of her own body providing herself with further evidence that her body is not her own. One scene shows her to have slept on her arm and she wakes up to find she has lost all feeling of it. She pulls it out from beneath her as if it were disembodied. Another arm reaches from behind her, a third arm within the shot while the audience can only see Esther. It is not until her boyfriend's head emerges from behind her that it is clear which arm belongs to which character. Extremities in *Dans Ma Peau* are detachable and interchangeable; like prosthetics, the human body becomes an object that can be broken down and rebuilt. This is played out to the extreme immediately prior to her second major act of self-harm.

The scene is set in a restaurant where Esther is having dinner with her business associates. The setting of the restaurant is introduced by low level panning of the tables as if attributing the point of view to the hands that rest there. Later, as Esther eats her dinner, her hand begins to act as if it has a mind of its own, much like the hands in *Mad Love* (Karl Freund, 1935) *The Beast with Five Fingers* (Robert Florey, 1946) and *Idle Hands* (Rodman Flender, 1999). She has to use her other hand to stop herself from clawing at the food on her plate. As she does so, the camera pans down her forearm to reveal it to be *actually* removed from her upper arm *(see fig 3.8)*. She taps at this removed hand as if it has no feeling, and when it is once more connected

she massages her elbow as if checking that she is again all in one piece before proceeding to stab at it with her steak knife and drawing blood. This forces Esther to confront her worst fear in a public setting and threatens her with the possibility that her lack of subjectivity will become apparent to others. If, as Kilby suggests, the act of self-harm serves as a substitute for a language that has failed, it is a substitution that remains unintelligible to her colleagues as they show no sign of noticing her actions. Thus the language is discounted, and her viability as a subject is called into question.
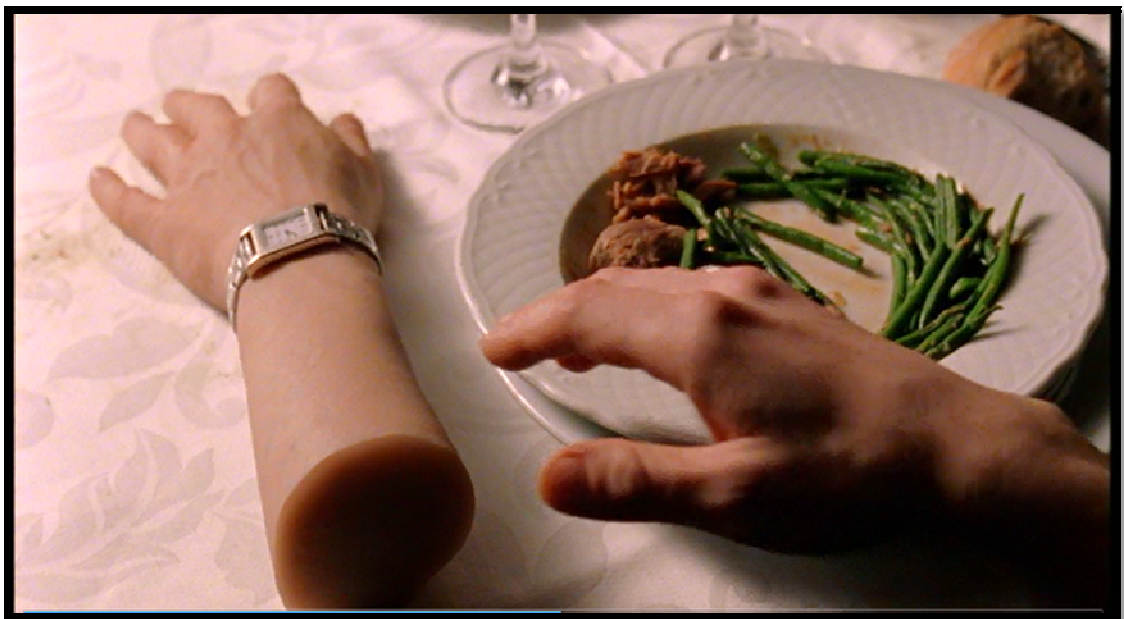
Figure 3.8: *Dans Ma Peau*: **Esther's arm completely detaches itself, symbolising her lack of affect.**

Her actions that follow both in the restaurant and later, at a hotel, indicate a primal desire that further connects Esther with the abject which begins with the taste of her own blood. Once she put her blood-stained fingers to her mouth, there are shots of her looking off camera that are cross-cut with visions of rich food that fill the

restaurant. Juice soaked fingers dig into the sticky pulp of moist fleshy fruit. Fat slices of steak are dipped and smothered in thick glutinous sauces. The images represent a decadence that Esther refuses. In the scene that follows she displays, instead, a desire for herself: her own blood, her own skin.

After checking into a hotel, Esther is drawn deeper into the abject as she tears off her skin with her teeth and tastes her blood. She abjects herself and then devours her own abjection, drawing the other inside herself until the boundaries that separate them have all but disappeared. As she cuts her thigh and brings it towards her face, her leg, shrouded in black, takes the place of a lover coming down towards their partner in bed *(see fig 3.9).* There is an over-the-shoulder shot as she bites and sucks her arm, tearing away pieces of skin with her teeth. From this angle, her arm is again presented as detached. If a unified subject is represented on-screen as a 'clean and proper body' then Esther has regressed almost entirely into the realm of the unsubject, what Tarr calls the 'inhuman, abject body' (Tarr, 2006: 81). Tarr is tracing Esther's narrative trajectory into the realm of the abject through the representation of her body. However, Esther's body also acts as defence against the same. In what can be read as a resistance against the desire for the abject, Esther keeps the skin she has removed as an object to cover her lack of unification. Through creating an 'other' to keep separate from herself, she attempts to retain the unification she has risked through her abjection. Yet this defence comes at a price: a piece of herself.

Figure 3.9: *Dans Ma Peau*: **Esther pulls her cut leg towards her as if it were a lover.**

Esther fails in her attempt to preserve this skin. In a scene where she and Vincent stand at a cash machine, she removes the skin from her wallet. Finding that it has dried out, she mourns her loss as Vincent, angry at her visible distress, invades her private space. Esther tells Vincent that she is crying because she cannot remember her pin number, so he attempts to resolve the situation by typing it in himself. Vincent cannot understand her distress for, to him, her loss does not matter. *He* could remember the pin number therefore *he* could retain what Esther had lost. This comes before Esther and Vincent's final scene together where Vincent turns away from her completely, unable to understand her actions. Esther is now completely detached from the possibility of defining herself through her relationship with other characters in the film. Through tearing away a piece of herself she has crossed the line into the realm of the unsubject. Any possible chance of returning to a subjective state lies in

her next attempt to contain herself, to define herself as separate and thus desirable to others. The next time she tries to remove a part of herself, she must not fail.

Before Esther's final self-harm scene, a certain level of anxiety is created for both her and the viewer through mise-en-scène, sound, camera movement and lens focus. In the scene where Esther walks through a shopping mall she is distracted by the neon lights. Close-up shots and point-of-view angles are used to signal her disorientation and construct a spectatorship that is aligned with her state of mind. The camera shifts dizzyingly between shots of Esther squinting and shots of bright lights, giving the impression the lights are shining in Esther's eyes. The space is further confused by close-ups of the ground that pick out details such as dirt and cigarette ends. As the camera moves to Esther's point-of-view it becomes unfocused and sways sickeningly from side to side. It continues to make its way slowly through the shopping centre while other shoppers, their faces blurred, speed past. When the film cuts away to show Esther leaning against a wall for support, these images are replaced by focused close ups of everything that is going on around her: people packing their shopping, paying for goods, sorting money. The sound of bags rustling, people talking, tills beeping are foregrounded and placed on top of each other. The locus of action and layering of sounds overwhelms the senses as three shots reveal Esther's solution to the chaos: a knife amongst some clothing; her gloved hand holding a credit card; and her face reflected in a camera lens.

During the scene that follows, Esther displays an increased desire to see herself. A shot-reverse-shot sequence shows Esther looking into a mirror and out at the

spectator (where the spectator is a substitute for Esther's reflection) as she twists and contorts her body into shapes that for Tarr make her appear 'subhuman, even insect-like' (2006: 82). By creating an insect-aesthetic these images further speak to Esther's confused sense of self *(see fig 3.10)*. She also regresses into a childlike state as she tests out her body's movement and peers at her reflection from behind a chair. But this child is monstrous: a fragmented version of what once was a unified self. The screens are split down the middle and objects and limbs are obscured by the frame as further indications of the fragmented and alienated self. At the beginning of this scene, sounds from the street could be heard so clearly from the hotel room, the film's spatial construction is distorted. This time it is the blurring of inside and outside spaces through the bringing together of image and sound that signals Esther's final collapse into herself.

The following scene is interrupted twice as the film cuts to a black screen. As Esther begins her self-harm, the screen cuts to black and the outside noises disappear. All that can be heard (and felt) is Esther's breathing. In spite of the aggravation the sound of Esther's breathing can cause, it can also create meaning for a black screen: through the foregrounding of only one or two sounds the whole of the scene is lost to darkness. Thus the sound of breathing acts as a form of meditation that relieves both Esther and the viewer of the chaotic jumble of fragmented images and sound. After a short period of this, the outside noise and the jumble of the split-screens come back only to fade again as her breathing becomes more even and the twitching of her leg stops. The camera again cuts to black. At the same time there is a sound of a door slamming loudly against the chaos of noise, people, and objects. Esther and the viewer are treated to the sound of silence. The sound of a door shutting not only

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provides relief from what was, for Tarr, the 'most testing' sequence of the film, (2006: 84) it also symbolises Esther's state of regression. The 'doorway' between subjectivity and regression has, for the time being at least, closed as Esther shows signs of handing herself over to the abject completely.
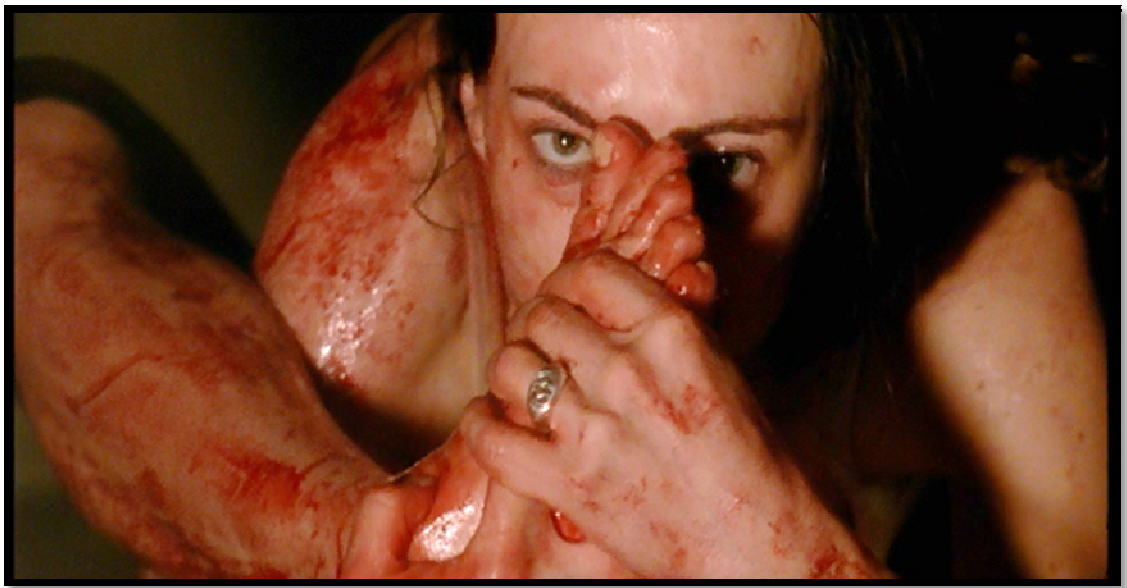
Figure 3.10: *Dans Ma Peau*: **Insect aesthetics further speak to Esther's confused sense of self.**

Esther removes a large section of her skin in this scene which she seeks to preserve by tanning it. Her fetishisation of this object as she handles it lightly and cradles it to her breast indicates that this is the object that will protect her from complete abjection.[96] Once Esther has taken this piece of skin and placed it at her breast, she leaves the hotel quickly, coat and handbag in hand. Does this mean that Esther has succeeded in her attempt to define herself? Has she found a way to return, albeit

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[96] Again, my own reading overlaps many observations Tarr makes in her analysis, as she questions whether the detached skin enables Esther 'to function with the abject kept at bay, just beneath the surface'(2006: 85). She concludes that the final shot of the film presents a 'more productive' perspective as it offers alternative representations of female physicality. More important to my focus, however, is that Esther remains fragmented, yet ultimately distanced from the viewer.

scarred and bruised, to a state of unified subjectivity after a brief foray into the abject? The following and final scene suggests otherwise.

The film ends with a repetition of a shot which begins as a close up of Esther's face that slowly pulls out to reveal her lying stretched out on the hotel bed. Yet it is not the image of a 'body as a whole' as Tarr suggests (2006: 81). If it were, the final image would provide a clearly defined sense of an ending for the film, as a body that has been continuously fragmented is re-integrated and 'whole.' Instead, the image is of Esther's face, hand and ankle dispersed over a black space *(see fig 3.11)*. Surrounding her is the green of the wallpaper and the yellow of the bedspread: colours of sickness. The wallpaper is patterned with repeated vertical lines that create bars to hold Esther in her state of regression for which self-harm was her only cure and eventual downfall. These lines are continued by folds in the bedspread which reach out of the scene towards the threshold between film and theatre, yet Esther is pushed right back into the wall. She is a body that is not working as it should, a body cut up and off from itself. Her death-like stare is re-enforced by the camera that repeatedly pulls out from a close up of her eye in a circular motion, referencing *Psycho*'s famous shower scene (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960). She is caught in this repetition, an endless cycle of reaching for herself only to be pulled further away. A line has been redrawn between viewer and film as Esther is finally and entirely dead to feeling, and dead to herself.

To understand the discomfort in watching *Dans Ma Peau*, I have suggested that the difficulty in watching this film lies in the construction of a spectatorship that

interrogates the distinction between film and viewer. Experiencing the physical responses as an affect produced by Esther's self-harm creates an anxiety regarding the distinction between subject and object that presents Esther as a particularly powerful figure of the abject. Kilby writes that perceiving other's self-harm 'threatens to expose the fragility and permeability of the reader's own skin boundary' (2001: 130). In a similar way, *Dans Ma Peau* confronts the viewer with the permeability of their own embodiment and the fragility of the distinction between the self as subject and film as object. If *Dans Ma Peau* were to follow a similar narrative conclusion as to the films considered in chapters one and two, this threat of permeability and objectification should be relieved by the end of the film, when the abject is finally expelled. Of course, this does not happen in *Dans Ma Peau.*

Figure 3.11: *Dans Ma Peau*: **The final image shows Esther fragmented.**

For Tarr, the end of the film, the skin Esther preserves and the photographs she takes of her mutilated body serve to 'maintain traces of her abjection and jouissance for

others' (Tarr, 2006: 86). I suggest it does so in a similar way the mutilated wound-image in stasis functions to reinstate the distance between viewer and film while leaving a reminder of physicality. The abject is kept at a distance: instead of sound and image that has created the sense of touch and a mode of spectatorship defined by embodiment, the photographs of her wounds lie flat. They are objects to behold as vision returns to its masterful state, no longer yielding to the object that it sees.

Yet the final image of Esther pushed back against the wall and gazing out at the camera invites us to cross that distance that otherwise renders Esther's testimony meaningless. Analysing another declaration of self-harm, that of a cartoon drawn by a self-professed self-harmer, Kilby states;

> The lack of closure refutes a simple license for witnessing, indeed it makes such reading a difficult task .... Here even the testimony of skin is empty in the sense that it does not have the significance of its own and can only make sense if the reader is willing to risk the decision to jump, and whether the testimony is alive or dead hangs in the balance of that decision (2001:141).

The dilemma that plagues the self-harmer, that Kilby here describes, is also painfully relevant for Esther. Where the photographs of her mutilated body and the distance between film and viewer in the final scene serve to undermine the embodiment created previously and thus render the viewer 'safe' from the threat of abjection, it

also removes the possibility of finding meaning in Esther's actions. Her testimony that creates such extreme disturbance lies empty. The final shot of *Dans Ma Peau* invites the viewer to 'jump,' to once more bear witness to that which threatens their own subjectivity.

Chapter Four: Extreme Frequencies

The very first stage of the organism's reaction to stimuli and the very first elements in retrieval are affective. It is further possible that we can like something or be afraid of it…without knowing what it is (R. B Zajonc, 1980: 254).

This chapter continues my discussion in Chapter Three of how sound can generate physical responses. However, whereas in the previous chapter I focused on a mode of spectatorship formed through sound separated from the object it signifies (i.e. self-harm), here I want to explore sound that does not directly signify something within the filmic world and, further, pushes at the limits of what is perceptible as film sound. To do this, I focus on very high and low frequencies to question how these soundscapes complicate notions of viewer and spectator. With close textual analyses of two mutilation films – *Irréversible* (Gaspar Noé, 2002) and *À l'intérieur* (Alexandre Bustillo, Julien Maury, 2007) – this chapter aims to examine aural perception in relation to modes of physical spectatorship.

The use of low frequencies is a common convention of the mutilation film and, as a result, these films draw on a longstanding connection in Western media between deep sounds and the threat of danger.[97] According to sound theorist Bruce Johnson,

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[97] In his article 'Quick and Dirty', Johnson references the composer Wagner as exploiting this connection in his use of a 'long low E' in the opening to his opera *Das Rheingold* (2008: 6). The horror film has also undoubtedly exploited and contributed to this connection with frequent uses of low sound. In his book, *The Horror Film,* Peter Hutchings includes a chapter on the sounds of horror in his book *The Horror Film,* and frequently references moments in the genre where low registers are used; however, he does not comment on the connection between deep sound and the evocation of fear.

low register sound in cinema has become 'a standard signal of imminent and immanent power, to the point where some musical fragments are instantly recognisable shorthand for "Watch out"' (Johnson, 2008: 6). A famous example of this is the shark's leitmotif in Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* (1975): 'a simple pulsating semitone figure in lower strings' (Cooke, 2008: 461). This sound is heard before the shark is seen, supporting Johnson's suggestion that the association created between low frequencies and danger across a period of time and wide range of media results in the evocation of anxiety *before* the sound is linked to any particular object (rather than anxiety arising from the separation after this link has been made).[98] Effectively, because of an extensive use of low registers to signify threat, the shark's leitmotif creates an identification with the danger the victim is in from the beginning of the very first attack sequence. Visually, the film's spectatorship shifts alignment rapidly between the impending victim Chrissie (through close-ups) and the shark (through point-of-view shots, although it is not yet known who or what's point-of-view this is) thereby creating a close tie with the scene but not solely with the victim (unlike the strong victim-identifications established in the first stage of the assault sequence in *Hostel* and *Saw II – 3D*). Rather, it is sound that ultimately creates an identification with the peril Chrissie is in. It is worth noting that the Latin root of the word 'identify' means 'to make the same' (Elizabeth Cowie, 1997: 72). With low frequencies, therefore, the film constructs the spectator as vulnerable (or, they are 'made the same' as Chrissie), yet it is arguable that this is only achieved through the

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For example, the 'booming noise' in *The Haunting* (Robert Wise, 1963) and 'deep and echoing reverberations' of voices in *The Keep* (Michael Mann, 1983) and *Candyman* (Bernard Rose, 1992) are anxiety-inducing, he argues, because they are inconsistent with certain expectations the film has built through set, environment and the physique of the monster (2004: 130, 132). I would not disagree that the juxtaposition of sound and image creates a certain level of unease, however I would also argue that the pitch of the sounds serve to increase this effect.

[98] Adding to the sense of danger the low frequency creates is also the rhythm of the semi-tone – the longer hold on the first note conjures up ideas of someone creeping up on someone else – and the tension generated by a lack of melody and tonal resolution.

viewer's cultural experiences of film and other media. The use of sound, in this instance, constructs an extra-diegetic identification, meaning not just that which is outside the filmic world (the viewer's knowledge and experiences) but that which also disrupts a clearly defined interiority/exteriority of film/viewer. Both this structure of identification, and the anxiety-response it generates, problematises a theoretical distinction between a textual construction and a pre-existing viewer.

The shark's leitmotif in *Jaws* sets up a sense of danger that is consequently recognised and thereby evokes anxiety which is confirmed and affirmed by the appearance of the shark. According to this idea, sound does not generate anxiety, it only points to something else which is capable of generating affect. Aurality is still undermined, therefore, by an image, act or particular (dangerous) circumstance. Yet scores are often relied upon to 'guide' the viewer emotionally through a film. In a discussion of *Wolf Creek* (Greg Mclean, 2005),[99] composer François Tétaz refers to what he calls the 'emotive metaphysical score' that influences the viewer by prompting a relevant emotion for a particular moment in the film (quoted in Hayward, 2009: 243). Tétaz is not explicit about what exactly constitutes such a score,[100] nor does he suggest whether the music points to something else (the relief

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[99] *Wolf Creek* is included in David Edelstein's review of contemporary horror which he dubs 'torture porn' in which he questions an apparently new appetite for sadism in film (2006). With its preoccupation with the pursuit and mutilation of human flesh, and intense anxiety generated by a largely unconventional score (see Philip Hayward, 2009, in which the composer of *Wolf Creek* offers his insights into how he constructed such a score) and editing that creates a spectatorship strongly tied to the victim (a juxtaposition of very long and very short shots mixed with strong cuts – meaning the camera moves 180 degrees a number of times in a short period, see Chapter One for an exploration into how the mutilation film creates anxiety through camerawork), this film is among the many that have been released over the past decade and a half that I consider to be mutilation films and, as such, notions of sadism and masochism are far more complex than Edelstein's article allows for.

[100] However, he does state that it is something he returns to towards the end of *Wolf Creek*. Towards the end of the film, particularly as one of the characters, Ben, makes a successful escape from where he had been held, extensive use of an orchestral instrument family, the strings, helps engender a bitter sweet sense of relief as he survives yet his two friends have met tragic and torturous deaths. We can

of escape, for example) and thereby evokes emotion, or whether the soundtrack itself creates relief. Both could be said to 'guide' the viewer; and both can evoke responses that blur the distinction of spectator and viewer (what might be referred to as an immersive spectatorship) while firmly grounding the viewer in an embodied film experience – for example, an increased heart-rate, the eruption of goose bumps, irrepressible tears (also important indicators of an immersion into or belief of the film as 'reality'). How can we distinguish particular sounds that directly generate physiological affects, how can this be theorised, and how would this impact on considerations of the notions of viewer and spectator in relation to the mutilation film?

The notion that low frequencies incite anxiety through a cultural association with danger is, as explained above, an argument posited by sound theorist Johnson. However, he goes further to suggest that low frequencies also affect the body physically before they are cognitively processed. Johnson cites the work of Joseph LeDoux who, by conducting an experiment that understood the auditory chain as ear > auditory midbrain > auditory thalamus > auditory cortex, found that the cortex 'played no part in producing the symptoms of fear, so that the auditory stimulus does not have to proceed to the auditory cortex' (2008: 3-4).This means that it may be possible for sound to impact on the body – in other words, generate anxiety – without depending on a particular object in the film, or previous knowledge and

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perhaps safely assume, therefore, that for Tétaz, a typical 'emotive metaphysical score' is generally orchestral as oppose to a reliance on sound effects that represent the film's setting (i.e. crashing waves, screeching seagulls) and experimental instruments such as metallic wires (see Hayward, 2009: 244 for further discussion of these particular sound techniques).

experience on the part of the viewer. It also means that sound can generate anxiety without being perceived *as sound.*

The examples given above, of low frequencies inducing anxiety through a connection with danger, are dependent on the sound being perceived aurally. Certain sounds escape human aural perception, however. The limits of human hearing generally range from 20hz to 20,000hz (20khz). Frequencies just above 20hz are known as sub-bass and those below 20hz are called infrasound. These are very low frequencies made up of vibration waves slower than 100vps (vibrations per second) and, as Suzanne Cusick states in her article 'Music as Torture / Music as Weapon,' are 'meant to produce effects that range from "disabling or lethal"' (2006)[101]. Sounds of various frequencies and decibels have been used to disperse crowds and interrogate subjects, emphasising the capacity for sound to affect the body and to destroy subjectivity (2006: 6). Less ominously, sub-bass has also been experimented with in the mutilation film.[102]

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[101] Cusick is quoting a contract 'authorizing now defunct Synetics Corporation to produce' such a weapon (2006). Cusick states that the contract can be found at https://www.armysbir/com/awards/sbir_fy99_phaseii_company.htm however this page is no longer available.

[102] I focus on *Irréversible* in this chapter to explore this phenomenon; however, other mutilation films use low frequencies to induce anxiety. For example, *Antichrist* (Lars von Trier, 2009) is full of indiscernible sounds, usually low register sounds, that could be distant traffic, wind, thunder, or even the sound of silence. In her article 'Chaos Rains', Bodil Maria Stavning Thomsen attributes the sound to 'demoniacal grunting' to support her reading of the film within the philosophical framework of Friedrich Nietzche's *The Anti-Christ* (1988) (2009, journal website states that page numbers are not for citation purposes). The sound's lack of familiarity or origin necessitates what Chion calls 'reduced listening' which 'focuses on the traits of the sound itself independent of its cause and of its meaning' (Chion 1994:29). One particular scene directly relates this sound to anxiety that is powerfully embodied: a montage of close-ups present various body parts affected by anxiety, such as the throat visibly gulping thus indicating a dry mouth, trembling hands, and a vein pulsing. Low rumbles, high pitch frequencies and arrhythmic beats are heard over this montage, both representing and constituting corporeal states of anxiety. This scene is one of the very few in this film to provide an object of anxiety – the body – that is related directly to the viewer's potential film experience. It also speaks to expanding theories of spectatorship, as it begins with shots of the eye and the ear (sight and sound

When *Irréversible* was screened at the Cannes Film Festival in 2002, Newsweek predicted that it would become the most 'walked-out-of' movie of 2003 (Ansen, 2003). Such a prediction adds to the film's notoriety already established by a nine minute long rape scene, a homosexual sado-masochistic nightclub as one of its settings, and the seemingly out-of-control roaming camera that is distinctive of Noé's directing style.[103] Adding to the discomfort *Irréversible* creates, I suggest, is the intense physical engagement that arises between viewer and film as a result of the use of sound. The confrontational experience the film affords – meaning the viewer is confronted by the filmic violence to the degree many choose to leave the theatre – is inextricable from the ways in which the film's spectatorship constitutes the viewer's corporeality and threatens the distinction between self and film.

Throughout *Irréversible* there is a sub-bass frequency on the soundtrack that rumbles uncomfortably underneath a more easily audible, but still very low, pulsating tone. Film theorist Tim Palmer points to the former sound frequency in his article 'Style and Sensation':

> Most strikingly, *Irréversible* uses, for sixty minutes of its running time, a
> barely perceptible but aggravating bass rumble that was recorded for
> Noé's purposes at 27 hertz, the frequency used by riot police to quell

being the primary senses through which film is analysed) before continuing on to other areas and indicators of physicality that a spectatorship can construct.

[103] Noé uses a similar style in his segment 'We Fuck Alone' for the compilation of erotic films titled *Destricted* (2006), and *Enter the Void* (2009), which is a full length film made up of the visual point-of-view of the main protagonist.

mobs by inducing unease and, after prolonged exposure, physical nausea (2006: 29).

Palmer does not specify how he determined this fact – while the sound is audible (just) it is incredibly difficult to pinpoint a frequency by listening alone (although certainly not impossible for those who are trained). By running a DVD of the film through a frequency analyser, however, I have ascertained that the particular frequency used in this film is between 27 and 28hz. This frequency has been mistaken for infrasound;[104] however it is only sub-bass. Infrasound is inaudible, whereas the frequency used in *Irréversible* is a very low but audible frequency; therefore, unlike frequencies under 20hz, it is on the threshold of identification. Sub-bass frequencies may thus be recognised as signifying danger which consequently causes anxiety (and disrupts the definition of spectator/viewer); but they also generate anxiety and nausea through a physiological reaction to the slow vibrating sound waves. These sounds, therefore, have a powerful capacity to disturb the listener; they provide one answer, at least, to why the film received predictions of such strong and protesting audience reactions by Ansen in 2003. This chapter aims to explore further the extent that sound can push the limits of cinematic identification by asking, how does the (barely aural but powerfully visceral) perception of sound complicate notions of viewer and spectator throughout *Irréversible*? What modes of identification does this noise[105] generate?

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[104] An online source claims that *Irreversible* contains infrasound, frequencies below 20hz, however the frequency analyser I used showed no activity below 27-28hz: http://geeknizer.com/secrets-of-infrasound-below-20hz/ Last accessed 19.10.2011

[105] I've used noise and sound interchangeably here; however, I am aware that there is a critical distinction between the two terms. For example, in her article 'Considering Sound,' Khadijah White argues that two processes in sound orientation are evaluation and response and it is at these points where sound can become noise (2012: 233). Whether the low frequency heard (and felt) throughout much of *Irréversible* should be theorised as sound and noise is a pertinent question; however, it is not

As well as extremely low frequencies, extremely high frequencies may also have strange and disturbing effects on the listener. This has been explored by sound artists since the 1960s, where sound installations interrogate the intersections of bodies and technologies.[106] In her album, *Sound Characters (Making the Third Ear)*, Maryanne Amacher uses very high pitch frequencies to create what she calls 'Third Ear Music' which occurs 'when our ears act as instruments and emit sounds as well as receive them .... sounds that will seem to be issuing directly from your head' (1998). Aggressive and penetrative, these tones appear to 'fill' your head so much so that Amacher finds it necessary to warn the auditor to 'not be alarmed! Your ears are not behaving strange or being damaged!' (1998). Although Amacher's warnings are somewhat hyperbolic, the use of such frequencies are particularly disturbing in *À l'intérieur* for reasons I will be exploring in the following textual analysis.

When ears emit sounds as well as receiving them, it is termed 'otoacoustic emission'. In his research into sensory hearing impairment, 'Otoacoustic Emissions,' David Kemp argues that they occur as a result of the cochlea's sensory hair cells responding to auditory stimulation (2002: 223). Sound, in effect, moves backwards; rather than moving from the outer ear (the visible ear, auditory canal and eardrum) through the middle ear (a small space in which there are the three smallest bones of

one I consider here as it is the pitch and consequent physiological properties this chapter explores, rather than the critical implications of the choice of terms used.

[106] See Gascia Ouzounian's article 'Embodied Sound' (2006), for an examination of two particular installations: *Sound Characters (Making the Third Ear)* (Maryanne Amacher, 1999), and *Kopfräume (Headscapes)* (Bernhard Leitner, 2003). Ouzounian offers a personal experience of the installations that foregrounds the self-aware and self-conscious listener. Ouzounian's aim is not to describe the sound itself, but rather to recognise how her body is realised 'through its interface with sound and space' (78). Although I will be presenting an exploration of high frequencies through an in-depth textual analysis, I share the concern with the ways sound constitutes the body, sometimes painfully, at the intersection of bodies and technologies.

the body) and into the inner ear (the cochlea), vibrations are instead transmitted from the cochlea to the middle ear. In spite of experiments with this phenomenon in sound installations and in clinical studies looking at hearing impairment, it is not often made use of in film. *À l'intérieur* is fairly unique in this respect, as high frequencies are used at particular intervals throughout the film to generate these 'backward' sounds. Therefore, after exploring low frequencies in relation to *Irréversible,* I will move on to an analysis of *À l'intérieur,* in particular questioning how, if at all, otoacoustic emissions are utilised to create identifications with the protagonist?

Irréversible consists of 12 scenes that are presented in reverse order, ending in the bright sun where Alex, the heroine of the film (played by Monica Bellucci) lies stretched out on the grass amongst happily playing children. The narrative follows Alex and her boyfriend, Marcus, as they attend a party with their friend Pierre. Alex leaves the party early and on her way home is attacked and raped. When Marcus finds out what has occurred he drags Pierre around the streets of Paris in search of the perpetrator. They end up in a homosexual sado-masochist club called Le Rectum where Marcus has his arm broken and Pierre attacks and kills the wrong man. They are arrested and the film opens in a dark room where a man confesses to committing incest with his daughter. The violence throughout this film is therefore intensified by a narrative that resists placing each scene in context.[107]

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[107] In a contributory chapter to Susan Hayward's book *French National Cinema,* William Higbee suggests that the reverse narrative decontextualises the violence in the film and consequently enhances it. See Chapter One where I argue that decontextualisation and its effects are also apparent in the torture sequence narrative seen throughout *Hostel* and *Saw II – 3D.*

The credit sequence starts in reverse, and the column of red and white names and words begins to rotate on the screen before four deep notes played on brass instruments abruptly break the silence. After this, more names and titles continue to appear on-screen in bold white letters separated by shots of black and underscored by a steady strong drumbeat on the soundtrack. In under two minutes, *Irréversible* has recalled Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958), the credits of which overlay rotating dynamic graphics, Hammer Horror's *Dracula* (Terence Fisher, 1958), which begins with red credits and very similar drumbeats underneath crashing symbols and brass instruments, and the ominous music heard in the opening of Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980) *(see fig 4.1).* Consequently, before the film begins, the title of the film and the names of those involved are inflected with a sense of danger and threat arguably generated both by physiological responses – in this instance, the startle effect[108] and low sounds – and cultural associations with suspense and horror films.

Figure 4.1: *Irréversible*: During the credit sequence, Irréversible recalls Hitchcock, Kubrick and Hammer Horror.

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[108] By this I mean the process where a film makes the viewer literally jump. One of the most famous and early examples of this was in Val Lewton's *Cat People* (1942, directed by Jacques Tourneur) when a bus enters the frame just as it is expected that a character is about to be attacked. Consequently, this technique became known as 'busses' or the 'Lewton Bus'. See Robert Baird's article, 'The Startle Effect,' (2000) for an exploration into the cognitive processes of this effect.

As well as creating a tie with the danger that the victim is in, sound can also effectively veil the mechanics of cinema that threaten to be exposed as a result of cuts that occur throughout the film. In this way, sound makes it possible to identify with the film's temporal and spatial spheres. As I pointed out in Chapter Two, certain filmic structures, such as shot/reverse-shot sequences, allow the spectatorship to reassume a relationship within the film that has been threatened by the limitations of the screen. However, in his article 'Notes on Suture', Stephen Heath argues that theories of suture should not be restricted to the shot/reverse-shot formation (1977: 66). To extend Heath's argument, I suggest that neither should it be restricted to systems of looking.[109] Certain uses of sound can hide the seams of film by connecting images to one another in a similar way to editing techniques such as shot/reverse-shot. For example, in an early scene of *Antichrist* (Lars von Trier, 2009)*,* a number of jump cuts are used that represent the distress of the female protagonist who has recently lost her son. However, the film upholds the fragile connection between spectator and film through a persistent low rumble that provides continuity over these jarring cuts. Not only does this uphold the connection between film and self by disguising the seams of cinema, it forces dependency on the sound to defend against the threat of loss. Yet, as has already been discussed, this sound induces anxiety by creating an identification with danger that is dependent on the viewer's exposure to particular media. In this way, *Antichrist* constructs a visceral

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[109] In their book *Film Theory,* Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener suggest that the 'continuity system bases itself primarily (if not exclusively) on looks' (2010: 91). I would argue that this is due to analytical limitations, not cinematic ones. In his pioneering book *Audio-Vision,* Michel Chion describes the prologue sequence to Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* (1966) where disparate shots are connected through the use of sound. It is a testament to how well sound is able to cover the cracks in spectatorship, created by the limits of the camera and the frame, that it so frequently goes unnoticed (1994: 3-5).

engagement that simultaneously covers and induces anxiety, as well as complicating the distinction between spectator and viewer.

The sub-bass frequency in *Irréversible* begins during the opening sequence and is over-laid by a higher, yet still very low, pulsating and distorted sound that is extraordinarily intense due to the sheer length of time it is played, but in itself is recognisable as a conventional horror film sound. Whereas the latter may be identifiable as sound, however, the former is less likely to be aurally perceived. As a result, anxiety generated by these sounds are not wholly separable and recognisable, therefore it is not a threat that is 'made the same' through the film's spectatorship (as it was in the case of Chrissie's vulnerability in *Jaws*). Rather, the distance between viewer and film is further bridged as affect originates within the self.

The use of the term affect in this thesis so far has been influenced by the psychoanalytic work of Cowie; here I am drawing on a theory of affect proposed by social psychologist R. B. Zajonc.[110] The commonality that runs through both their

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[110] Affect is a difficult concept to pinpoint, both because it is so widely theorised, and because, as Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth state in the introduction to their edited collection, *The Affect Theory Reader,* there is no 'originary state for affect' (2010: 2), it always arises through interaction. Because of this difficulty, however, affect is a fluid notion that lends itself to theorisations of physical spectatorship. The most recent revival of affect theory, they state, came from the publications, in 1995, of Eve Sedgwick and Adam Frank, 'Shame in the Cybernetic Fold,' and by Brian Massumi, 'The Autonomy of Affect,' which forged two areas of interest. Sedgwick and Frank influenced 'quasi-Darwinian' approaches - which, I suggest is closely related to my approach to affect in this chapter, due to its concerns with the way we, as biological organisms, have evolved to hear and perceive – and a Deleuzian 'Spinozan route' that 'locates affect in the midst of things and relations' (2010: 5-6). With my references to Cowie and Zajonc, I am not proposing either theory of affect to be 'placed onto' the mutilation film, or concepts of physical spectatorship, nor am I suggesting these are the only lines of enquiry available to explore affect and the mutilation film. The physical responses that I have distinguished, defined and attempted to theorise, speak strongly to the work of Cowie and Zajonc, allowing me to formulate a language with which to articulate the bodily sensations generated by the mutilation film. Further research into physical spectatorship, and affect, might hopefully broaden avenues of thought in these areas that will help towards an understanding of films that strain against certain configurations of key concepts in cinema studies.

research is that affect is a bodily response. The variable component is the extent to which this involves cognition or 'mental work'. For Cowie, affect is the result of 'a mental and (perhaps unconscious) process of thought' (2003: 30). In other words, cognition is needed to produce affect, even if affect may be detached from the original experience and/or object.[111] Zajonc, on the other hand, describes affect as '"pure" sensation', it is '"pure" sensory input' that is *not* cognition (1980: 287).[112] He goes further to make the claim that '[i]t is further possible that we can like something or be afraid of it before we know precisely what it is and perhaps even *without* knowing what it is' (1980: 254). It is this final explanation of affect that clearly describes the experience of perceiving a sub-bass frequency such as the one that is played throughout most of *Irréversible*. Through the use of this noise, that could be best described as situating itself within the body of the viewer, *Irréversible* constructs a physical spectatorship that disrupts the dominance of the gaze and resists a reading of the representation of rape as pure spectacle.

Often when rape occurs in a film, typical questions voiced by cultural critics include: is this necessary? Is this gratuitous? Why did the film need to include this? Why do we need to watch this? What is being said, if anything, about the ethics of witnessing a representation of rape? Can we learn anything from this? Can it tell us anything about the significance of rape and its representations to Western culture? In her book, *Watching Rape*, Sarah Projansky makes a persuasive argument that draws on

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[111] See Chapter Three for an exploration of this theory of affect in relation to Marina de Van's *Dans Ma Peau,* (2002).
[112] In the introduction to *Affect Theory Reader,* Gregg and Seigworth point out that 'affect and cognition are never fully separable – if for no other reason than that thought is itself a body, embodied' (2010: 2-3). With this turn to Zajonc, I do not want to place a definitive boundary between affect generated by *Irréversible* and cognition; however, I suggest this particular approach to affect will help formulate ideas around certain bodily states that might arise *before* entering conscious perception, rather than attempting to separate affect from cognition after it has been consciously perceived.

Laura Mulvey's foundational work on visual pleasure. Through a reading of Ridley Scott's *Thelma and Louise* (1991), Projansky links rape with male control over language and the gaze. Projansky provides a close textual analysis of camera movement, editing, and character acting and argues that control over the gaze is subverted – albeit ineffectually – with final clips of 'women looking at and being with women.' (2001: 132) To a certain extent then, the damage caused by looking (as the gaze is linked to assault) is finally and momentarily relieved by looking. At the end of the film, Thelma and Louise have a certain amount of control over the gaze, although this is limited by the isolated shots of very short duration that restrict their bodies and bind their gazes to a particularly short, and posthumous, moment in time. The question remains: if the gaze is closely linked to sexual assault, as Projansky argues, how can an analysis of the structures of the gaze interrogate cultural representations of rape?

In her book, *Public Rape*, Tanya Horeck asks the pertinent question 'can looking cure the damage done by looking?' (2004: 97). In reference to Projansky's analysis of *Thelma and Louise* the answer would be no. Yet the privileging of sight in this question underlines the need for attention to be paid to other senses: hearing and touch in particular. In her book *Color of Angels,* Constance Classen states that the sense of hearing has historically been second only to that of sight in its connection to an intellectual – therefore 'high' – status (1998: 66). If this is true, then why has music, sound, and noise been so frequently neglected in the study and research of film? Analyses of the representation of rape in film, including those cited by Horeck and Projansky, rarely if ever consider the impact sound has on the film's spectatorship. Concern is almost always with whose point-of-view is privileged, if

the camera positioning invites a voyeuristic spectatorship, and with how explicit the rape is in terms of the visual representation of sexual violence. Could the neglect that music, sound, and noise in cinema have suffered be due partly to the connection between hearing and feeling, sound and touch? If sight is the 'highest' sense with hearing coming in a close second, touch is certainly the 'lowest' sense being the most associated with the body and corporeality (Classen, 1998: 66). The collapse of hearing into touch shifts music, sound, and noise into the realm of the body rather than the mind, irrationality rather than reason, and physicality rather than intellectuality, leaving sight as the sole indicator of rationality, culture, and intelligence.

In the simple yet evocative first sentence of *Color of Angels* Classen states that 'Modern Western Culture is the culture of the eye' (1998: 1). This culture is, as stated above, one of reason, of intellectuality, of the mind. Certain terms that are used by scholars in the study of film reflect this. For example, to 'read' a film suggests a detached study of the text that avoids any reference to its physicality. In her book, *Carnal Thoughts*, Vivian Sobchack calls attention to the disparity between film critics and film scholars, stating that reviews will often focus on the physical act of watching a film whereas scholars will shift any meaning extracted from this process onto language (2004: 57-58). Yet, as Carl Plantinga points out in his book *Moving Viewers,* understanding arising from an analysis that takes into account the body of the viewer is not separable from, or parallel to, that which is gleaned from a study of the dialogue, narrative structure and visual styles. Instead, they are intertwined, each having an effect on the other. In addition, a misunderstanding of the physiological aspect of film spectatorship may lead to a confusion of the

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'thematic workings of a film, and perhaps even... the story itself' (2009: 4). I am not convinced of the extent to which a film may be 'misunderstood', or even how this would be measured or who has the final say, nor would I want to suggest that those who walked out of the theatre when *Irréversible* was screened at Cannes Film Festival in 2002 were in some way wrong to do so. However, I would suggest that the extreme variations of response to this film, and other mutilation films, indicate cracks within critical and scholarly discourse into which the body of the viewer has fallen.

Before I move on to a textual analysis of *Irréversible* in which I shall argue that sound is used to disturb the dominance of the visual so as to allow for a critical and resistant reading of its representation of rape, it is necessary to ask: what mode of spectatorship is constructed during the rape scene in *Irréversible*? When Horeck asks the same question to illustrate her key concerns, the options given are either witness or voyeur; '[a]re we bearing witness to a terrible crime or are we participating in shameful voyeuristic activity?' (2004: vi) This is a critical question, not only because one position implies innocence and the other guilt, but also because each has a varying level of complicity. A voyeuristic position is a detached vantage point from which the rape may be spied on, in secret, in order to derive (often sexual) gratification. Plantinga rejects the notion that *any* form of film viewing is voyeuristic due to its lack of secrecy, (2009: 23-25). However, I would argue that both the darkness of the cinema and the feelings of guilt and shame at being seen *looking at* (and potentially enjoying) a representation of rape is voyeuristic.

During the rape in *Irréversible* there is a fixed camera position at ground level that frames the violent act as if an unseen person were crouching and spying; this type of camera-work invites a reading of a sadistic and voyeuristic spectatorship *(see fig 4.2)*.[113] Both Horeck's analysis of *The Accused* (Jonathan Kaplan, 1998) (2004: 91-116) and Sarah Projansky's reading of *Thelma and Louise* (2001: 121-153) have suggested the act of rape is strongly connected with the act of looking. More overtly, Yoko Ono and John Lennon's documentary *Rape* (1969), where a young woman is followed with a camera until she is reduced to tears, in no unsubtle terms implies that to be the object of the gaze is to be raped. The camera placement as described above thus creates a position that is complicit with the rape through the desire to control; although not actually involved with the act of rape, simply *looking*, as Horeck notes is suggested through *The Accused*'s narrative, is bound to the law. Alternative spectator positions are offered by certain camera locations that disrupt voyeuristic gratification, for example in Lukas Moodysson's *Lilya 4-Ever* (2002) when Lilya is forced into the sex-trade her encounters are filmed entirely from her point of view. However, the voyeuristic position is one that *Irréversible* constructs through dialogue and camera movement/positioning and yet, I argue, it is disturbed by noise.

Through the use of noise in *Irréversible,* the viewer, to borrow Horeck's term, bears witness to the rape. To witness something is to see it, to *bear* witness to it suggests one must also endure it, go through it, and suffer it. In her article, 'Carved in Skin:

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[113] Noé is also, again, referencing Kubrick who makes use of ground level shots in *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) during a scene where a homeless man is beaten up by the main protagonist (also called Alex) and his followers. Further to this, there is an inclusion of a poster depicting Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) in the final scenes of *Irréversible*. Noé continues to pay his debt to Kubrick with his extraordinary manipulation of the soundtrack: both *A Clockwork Orange* and *Irréversible* make use of sound (in the case of the former it is the use of the song *Singin' in the Rain* rather than sub-bass frequencies) to construct a highly disturbing rape scene.

Bearing Witness to Self-Harm', Jane Kilby argues that to bear witness to another person's acts of self-injury means to look at their own 'painful, if not aggressively compelling, desire to testify to their own traumas.' (2001, p. 125) What would constitute as trauma to a viewer of a film? *Irréversible,* like all physical mutilation films, questions the position of viewer as the perceiving subject and instead blurs the notions of self and film thereby rendering the viewer vulnerable in the reversibility of the film-viewer dynamic. Through a number of techniques already described, of which the sub-bass frequency is, I argue, dominant, the representation of rape in *Irréversible* is a testament to these very traumas. To bear witness to it is to be confronted with one's own fragility and permeability – to bear witness to it is to yield to one's own rape.
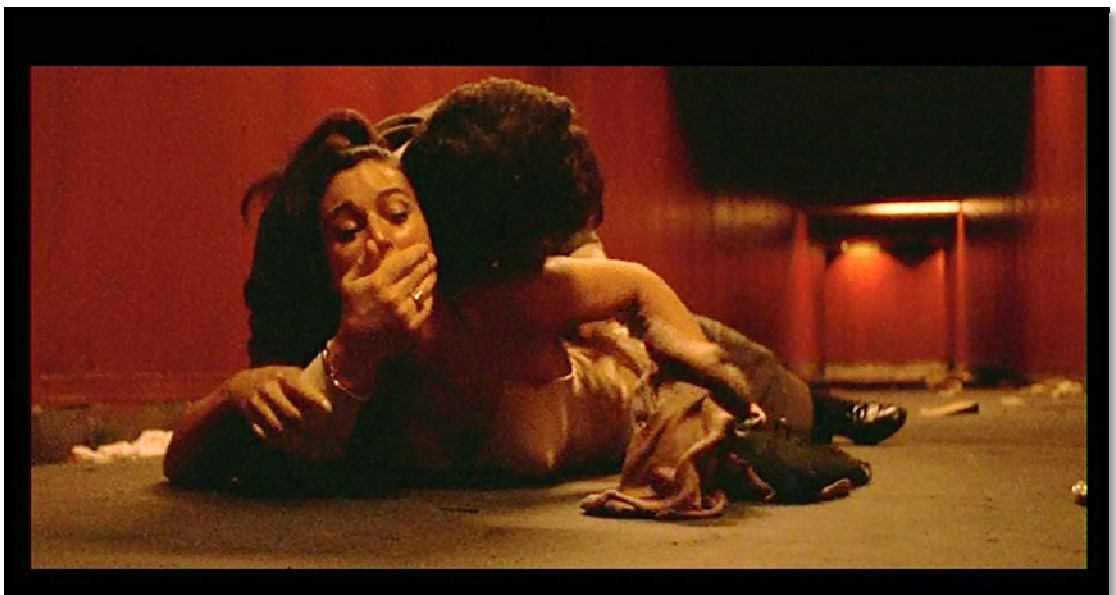
Figure 4.2: *Irréversible***: A voyeuristic camera angle invites a reading of a sadistic spectatorship.**

Up until the rape scene, the style of cinematography, as mentioned above, is very distinctive to Gaspar Noé as it moves freely and seemingly randomly through the world of the film. Its erratic movements inhibit the spatial positioning in terms of the

film's construction of spectatorship, while also potentially generating nausea as a result of motion sickness. Such responses have been reported as a direct result of prolonged shaky or overly dynamic camera movements[114] and they speak directly to the split nature of the film-viewing subject. In Chapter One I referred to Richard Rushton's re-reading of Christian Metz's theories of spectatorship where he explains that, to be a spectator, he is 'encouraged to forget the existence of [his] own self in its bodily form' (2002: 112). Rushton parts ways with Metz' theories when he argues that the spectator, rather than being 'filled up' by cinema, is instead '*emptied of all contents'* as they are 'unencumbered by the clumsiness … of [their] own bodies' and, in rare moments 'unshakeably *believes* in the reality of the screen world in which one is engrossed' (2002: 113, 114). Yet the phenomena of motion sickness during film-viewing suggests that the body is not forgotten, and that spectatorship cannot be 'unencumbered' by embodiment at the same time as movement within the film world is readily believed in. The viewer's body, therefore, lies uncomfortably and nauseated at the intersection of these two viewing positions.

In a scene where Alex walks through the city at night and descends into a subway tunnel, the camera follows her at a close distance. The stalker-position shifts to one of a voyeur once her rapist, Le Tenia (meaning tapeworm) pushes Alex onto the concrete and the camera settles at a medium long-shot, at ground level. Such camera movement and positioning suggests both alignment with a potential attacker and sadistic voyeur respectively. Predictably the object of the camera's gaze is a female

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[114] See Chapter Five for a discussion of motion sickness in relation to *Cloverfield* (Matt Reeves, 2008).

who is highly sexualised in a revealing white dress.[115] *Irréversible* thus constructs what may be read as a sadistic voyeuristic spectatorship that, if male, upholds hetero-normative structures of male/female, subject/object, activity/passivity. After forty minutes of generating anxiety and nausea through sound and camera movements, *Irréversible* creates a position that momentarily reinstates the distinction between self and film.

The voyeuristic camera positioning throughout the rape is subverted in two ways however. The first is through the return of the gaze, and the second is through the connection of the senses of hearing and feeling that disrupts the dominance of the gaze. Firstly, during the rape, a figure appears in an extreme long-shot walking into the tunnel. The figure is so far away it remains a blurred silhouette; however, it pauses momentarily, looking down the tunnel towards the rape and the camera before leaving *(see fig 4.3)*. The figure disrupts the secretive voyeuristic gaze by returning it; the rape is no longer private between rapist, victim, and viewer. It is thus made public and forces awareness onto the spectator. The figure serves as a reminder that voyeurism is not just watching an act but allowing the act to happen. In this way, *Irréversible* links the gaze with the act of rape and criticises rape as a spectacle.

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[115] The female victim dressed in white further connects *Irréversible* to the history of horror cinema; however, this may be due to a cultural consciousness of the genre rather than the victims in the films themselves. In his book *Children of the Night,* Randy Loren Rasmussen argues that this particular visual stereotype, and the virtues it implies (i.e. innocent, helpless, virginal) are pure fiction, stating instead that heroines 'come in a variety of temperaments, capabilities and dramatic functions' (1998: 7). However, the fact that the female figure in white is a popular conception of the horror film victim means that this particular iconography strains against separate notions of spectator and viewer by drawing on cultural knowledge and experience.

Figure 4.3: *Irréversible*: **The shadowy figure disrupts the secretive, voyeuristic gaze by returning it.**

I have already argued that the viewer becomes the object of anxiety because they have no object to which to link the affect as sound is barely audible and is not linked to any particular object on-screen. However, once the rape begins, should this not form an object onto which anxiety is placed? Similar to the assault narrative sequence, the film has created anticipation of danger or threat (yet it is unclear as to what this might be, as oppose to *Saw II – 3D* and *Hostel* where it is clear that torture is threatened). The rape, therefore, fulfils this anticipation, effectively satisfying expectations as well as providing an object on which the anxiety may be placed. However, speaking from a subjective viewpoint, the rape in *Irréversible* does neither of these things. One possible response to this query, although certainly not the only one, is that the sub-bass frequency, as well as disrupting the construction of a voyeuristic spectatorship through camera placement, also inhibits the extent to which the film may be understood as separable from the self, even after an anxiety-object is provided.

So what does this nature of analysis offer in terms of perceptions of rape in film? I have argued that it creates a spectatorship that bears witness to the rape and creates an identification with the rape victim rather than the attacker. I have also argued that it disrupts mastery over the image and subverts the dominance of seeing over hearing and touch. How does this contribute to the ethics of both creating and spectating representations of rape? How can one justify the necessity of including a representation of rape in a film? By returning to Horeck's questioning of the act of looking at the portrayal of rape, the possibility arises that the representation of rape has the potential to cure the damage done by rape. I have already argued that through the analysis of camera angles and points of view alone this particular potential is limited. Does physical spectatorship, and the use of noise, change this? Can it be argued that it has a reparative value that makes the representation of rape necessary? To answer these questions attention must be turned to the final scene.

The final scene shows Alex laid out on the grass under the sun. The shot frames her entire body, once beaten and bloody, now intact and clean. By providing an image of her clean and proper body[116] this scene articulates the horror of her assault while denying its reality. It acts as both an ominous reminder of what is to come and a final pay-off for the viewer who has been subjected to the previous rape and nauseating and anxiety-inducing sub-bass frequencies *(see fig 4.5)*. This sound ceased before

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[116] Earlier to this scene, Alex is naked in bed with Marcus; both their unblemished bodies are in stark contrast to the violence that occurred before this (according to the film's running time) at the same time as mimicking positions that are formed by Alex and her rapist *(see fig 4.4)*. These 'matching juxtapositions' likewise serve to remind the viewer of the horror that has occurred while also denying its reality; this disavowal is further helped by the reverse narrative i.e. the attack has already happened and these unmarked bodies still exist, implying there were no consequences to the brutality seen previously.

this scene and in its place plays Beethoven's Symphony No. 7 in A Major.[117] The classical music is as soothing as the image of Alex's recovered body, yet its reparative value is disrupted by the final sound of helicopter blades, which is acousmatic (that is: there is no image to attach a source to this sound).[118] The film is an oscillating soundscape between nourishing music and devastating noise that acts as a reminder of the transience of Alex's peace and safety. Thus, through the reverse narrative and the shift from noise to music, Alex has escaped her assault, yet these techniques cannot *end* assault nor can they ever fully cure the damage done by rape. To borrow from Projansky's analysis of Thelma and Louise's suicide, Alex is 'caught on the precarious brink between death and life' (2001, p. 133) – between resistance to the assault and the inevitability of the assault. Physical spectatorship does not, and cannot, cure the damage done by rape. But by studying rape's noise rather than just its image it becomes possible, however, to change the way such representations are experienced and perceived.

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[117] In *Conventional Wisdom* (2001), Susan McClary suggested that Beethoven's work inspired notions of sexual difference through perceived phallic thrusting that crushed weak female cadences at the end of the symphony. In this respect, the music reinforces the gaze upon Alex's clean, unmarked body by situating the woman as a passive object to be looked at by the active male. It could also be seen as a further reference to Kubrick, as Alex's favourite music (in *A Clockwork Orange*) is Beethoven.

[118] In his book, *Audio-Vision,* Chion suggests that acousmatic sound 'draws our attention to sound traits normally hidden from us by the simultaneous sight of the causes – hidden because this sight reinforces the perception of certain elements of the sound and obscures others, The acousmatic truly allows sound to reveal itself in all its dimensions' (1994: 32). The abrasive sound that is heard after the Beethoven excerpt is unsettling for the very fact that we cannot see its source – arguably, if there had been a helicopter present on the screen, this unnerving effect of the sound would have been inhibited. Chion disagrees with Pierre Schaeffer who, Chion states, considers the acousmatic situation to encourage reduced listening, a practice where the traits of sound is focused on over its source. Schaeffer argues that reduced listening, therefore 'provokes one to separate oneself from causes or effects in favour of consciously attending to sonic textures, masses, and velocities' (summarised by Chion, 1994: 32). Chion suggests the acousmatic situation initially creates *more* attention to the source of the noise, as one tries to discover what it is. There is potentially an element of this when the helicopter-like sound emerges at the end of *Irréversible*; I would also suggest that because of this sound's harsh texture, it recalls the viewer back to their bodily state, rather than create a form of separation from the self.

Figure 4.4: *Irréversible*: **Alex and Marcus - unblemished bodies are matching juxtapositions of the earlier violence and rape.**

Figure 4.5: *Irréversible*: **Alex's unraped body serves as both a reminder and disavowal of the violence she is to face.**

Alexandre Bustillo's and Julien Maury's *À l'interieur*, released in 2007, emerged from France around the time critics were noting a plethora of films marked by

violent representations of sex and attacks on the human body.[119] Although *À l'interieur* is similarly explicit in terms of its preoccupation with bodily mutilation, it has been suggested that it belongs less to the 'New Extreme', theorised as being an isolated phenomenon that is currently disappearing,[120] and more to general contemporary French horror.[121] Attempts to place it within or outside of styles, trends and/or genres distracts from the most notable aspect of this film that it shares with all the films analysed in this thesis – the generation of intensive and uncomfortable physical responses. In this next section of the chapter, I want to explore what responses are evoked throughout *À l'interieur,* and how these form particular identifications that enhance the disturbing nature of this film's spectatorship.

The opening shot of *À l'intérieur* is a computer-generated baby[122] close-up and still in the womb. Dialogue is heard on the soundtrack, but it is muffled, thereby linking

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[119] For explorations into this contemporary trend see James Quandt (2004) whose review of Brian Dumont's *Twentynine Palms* turned into a wider critique of what he considers to be a French trend dependent on shock tactics over depth of meaning; Tim Palmer (2006, 2007) who coins his own rubric *cinéma du corps* to highlight the aggressive and confrontational spectatorships these films construct; Martine Beugnet (2007) who draws on Deleuze, Merleau-Ponty and Bataille to consider the transgressive nature and sensory impact of cinema; and Kendall and Horeck (2011) who are the first to bring together a compilation of articles on the topic.

[120] In a follow up piece to his original article 'Flesh and Blood' Quandt suggests that giving a name to the pattern of films that appear preoccupied with violent mutilations and sex effectively sounded its death knell. What 'it' (New French Extremity) was is still up for debate. Quandt suggests it would be inaccurate to call it a movement because the films are too distinct, and that perhaps it was simply the 'wilful imposition of thematic pattern on a disparate and disconnected group of films' (2011: 213). Primarily because I argue many of the films that have been suggested by critics and scholars to represent the New French Extremity share a concern with bodily mutilation with films outside of this particular group of texts, I suggest that this is not the case. I consider the New French Extremity to be part of a wider concern with the intersection of bodies and technology that cinema in particular is currently experimenting with.

[121] Quandt makes this distinction between French horror and 'its art-house confraternity' that is, he suggests, often confused by film critics and scholars. It is a distinction, he concedes, that is complicated by films such as *À l'intérieur* and *Martyrs* (Pascal Laugier, 2008) (2011: 210-211).

[122] I choose to use the term 'baby' over 'foetus' because although it is shown as still being in the womb, it is fully formed and recognisable *as* a baby, whereas the term foetus lends notions of under-development.

an aural and visual position inside the womb. Suddenly, a screech of tyres and sounds of broken glass erupt and the baby propels towards the screen, seemingly hitting it/ the uterine wall *(see figs. 4.6 and 4.7)*. Like the brothel scene in *Hostel,* this shot acts as a metaphor for a spectatorship that is immersive at the same time as it holds the spectator/viewer at arm's length. Audio-visual correlation creates strong ties with the world of the film, yet the movement (and aesthetics) of the computer-generated image re-establishes the divide between film and viewer constituted by screen, camera and technology.

The sounds and images following the above opening shot serve to, again, create a position strongly tied into the world of the film. The camera moves along a road at ground level and reveals a car that has suffered a bad crash – its bonnet is crumpled, windows smashed and smoke emits from the engine. A continuous unbroken high pitch tone is heard, overwhelming all other sounds, again producing a soundscape that envelops the viewer and extends the filmic world into the theatre.[123] Here, the main character, Sarah, is introduced, sitting next to her husband, Matthieu, who died in the crash. Sarah is pregnant, and resolves to spend Christmas Eve on her own before her baby is born. The rest of the narrative takes place over this one night, during which time the barrier Sarah attempts to create between herself and the outside world is entirely obliterated.

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[123] See Robert Walker's article 'Cinematic Tinnitus,' (2012) for an exploration into different ways tinnitus has been represented in film. He draws on Rick Altman's work (1992) to argue the point-of-audition is 'directly analogous to the more familiar point-of-view' shot (163). Walker also argues that the representation of tinnitus creates a link to the 'lost' silent cinema (meaning that cinema was never actually silent therefore sound films are perhaps better equipped to portray silence). Further to this, he suggests that tinnitus is more akin to emotion than physical affliction. I would suggest that the biological phenomenon of tinnitus serves to blur the boundary between emotion and physicality as it disrupts the sense of self as defined by a determinate structure of interiority/exteriority, making it a particularly poignant element to the soundscape of the physical mutilation film.
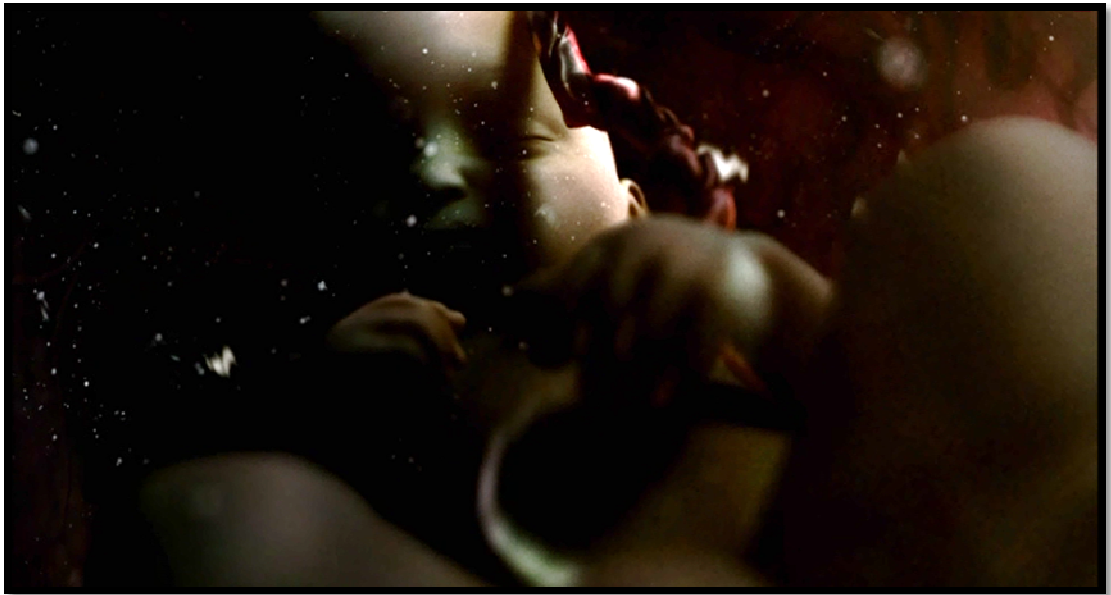
Figure 4.6: *À l'intérieur*: **Audio-visual correlation creates strong ties with the world of the film…**

Figure 4.7 *À l'intérieur*: **… yet the movement of the computer-generated image re-establishes the divide between film and viewer constituted by screen, camera and technology.**

The high tone continues through the credit sequence, during which a massive amount of blood mixed with rain covers the cinema screen and slides across it, as if washing down a windscreen, again rendering the screen an effective barrier reinforced by graphics – this time, the names of the cast and crew *(see fig 4.8)*. The film has twice now created a tie only to subsequently redraw the line between viewer and film. The initial bloody image gives way to a foetus, close-up, at first resembling ill-defined viscera. Adult hands can just be discerned amongst this mess of blood and flesh,[124] thus disrupting notions of interiority and exteriority that the film has twice now subverted and reinstated. This oscillation between immersion and reinstating of boundaries is continued throughout the narrative as the protagonist, Sarah, attempts to barricade herself from those trying to get into her house, her body, her womb. No matter what she does, the threat keeps coming, creeping closer and closer at the same time as her baby threatens to emerge. Sarah is the intersection where the definition of interiors and exteriors is interrogated and destroyed. Through the use of high frequencies, *À l'intérieur* creates the same position for the viewer.

After the credit sequence, and its spectacular array of various vibrant red tones, the colours become muted and Sarah is presented as someone who is, on some level, detached from everything that is going on around her. She is often slow to react to the conversation of others, her movements are unhurried, verging on sluggish, and her face betrays very little emotion. It is, for want of a better term, an expression that is absent. Repeatedly, visuals and audio are used to symbolise her mental state: the

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[124] The hands that search through the blood for the baby are initially confusing because in the next scene the protagonist, Sarah, is shown still pregnant and having an ultra-sound. However, by the end of the film this is explained – the woman who invades Sarah's house was in the other car that is only revealed later through a flashback. Unsurprisingly, she was pregnant and lost the baby in the crash. The hands, however, also point to one of the final scenes where the invader, known only as La Femme, cuts into Sarah's womb to retrieve her unborn baby.

camera gazes at a door slowly closing; later, it retreats slowly from the exterior of her house, showing only one isolated light shining from inside *(see fig 4.9)*; the sounds of multiple locks secure her front door from the outside world; and the position of the camera gazing down at Sarah from the landing of her house, banisters in the foreground, ties the spectatorial position into the world of the film but separate from Sarah and the space she creates for herself.

Figure 4.8: *À l'intérieur*: **The film twice creates strong ties before reinstating the boundary between viewer and film.**

Like many mutilation films, some form of viewing media is part of *À l'intérieur*'s narrative. Sarah is a photographer; this character choice shows a certain self-consciousness of the generic concerns of the horror genre in particular and film spectatorship in general. In *Srpski Film* (Srdjan Spasojevic, 2010) the protagonist, Milos, finds out the extent of his atrocious acts – including rape and murder – when he views video recordings of them. Jennifer, the cover girl and victim in *Captivity* (Roland Joffé, 2007) is forced to watch recordings of other women who have been similarly terrorised before the same thing is done to her. Esther (*Dans Ma Peau,*

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Marina de Van, 2002) takes photos of her self-harm, and the tragic protagonist of *The Human Centipede II: Full Sequence* (Tom Six, 2011), Martin, is a security guard who obsessively watches *The Human Centipede: First Sequence* (Tom Six, 2009) as well as idolising a scrap book full of celebrity pictures from the film and presiding over an underground car park, observing customers through monitors. Torture, therefore, becomes a process of the gaze, suggesting a critical stance towards cinematic spectatorship. However, in every one of these examples, the mastery of the gaze is undermined. Milos is watching himself carry out torturous deeds, Jennifer gazes at her own fate,[125] Esther is the woman on both sides of the camera and Martin becomes an actor in his own version of the original film as he strives to create a human centipede. Like the mutilating wound-image, these examples collapse notions of sadism and masochism because the protagonist/victim is both subject and object of the gaze.

Figure 4.9: *À l'intérieur*: Visuals are used to symbolise Sarah's mental state.

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[125] Jennifer watches a video of another girl having acid poured onto her face before she is subjected to liquid being thrown on her. In the following scene, when she removes her bandages, it becomes clear that acid was *not* poured onto her as her skin remains unharmed; however, for both the character and viewer, at the moment where the liquid met her flesh, Jennifer was taking on the role of the girl she had previously gazed upon.

Sarah plans to take photographs of burning cars (the result of ongoing riots, thereby contextualising the film and linking Sarah's desire to shut herself away with contemporary socio-political concerns) when she herself lost her husband in a car accident, and with it her future as she knew and planned it. Rather than her being placed in the image that she had previously gazed upon, with photography Sarah is removing herself from the picture. During one scene, where she sits motionlessly on a bench and watches a young couple play with their small child, she then takes out her camera and starts capturing their image. The camera removes her from the tragedy she suffered while allowing her to control it and regain something of what she has lost. Later, Sarah takes herself away into her dark room, surrounded by photographs, all featuring eyes staring out at her, most of them of herself and Matthieu *(see fig 4.10).* Under the watchful gaze of a life she once knew, Sarah closes her eyes as arms begin to curl around her waist to hold her heavily pregnant body. Matthieu has appeared and, for a short while, Sarah gives way to an emotional embrace before a shot of very short duration interrupts the trance and, in flashback, transforms the screen once more into a windshield, cutting Sarah off from her fantasy.

Figure 4.10: *À l'intérieur*: Sarah fantasises of her late husband under the watchful gaze of a life she once knew.

À l'intérieur pays a debt to another film that articulates anxieties surrounding interiors and exteriors of the body through the birthing scene with an unmistakable reference to Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979) and James Cameron's *Aliens* (1986). Sarah wakes abruptly from her sleep and finds it difficult to breath. Falling forward onto the ground, she coughs up a milky substance and her cat cowers, yowling in a close-up shot, as a baby forces its way out of her throat and mouth. If it was not clear at this point that Sarah was dreaming, she proceeds to wake up again to the sound of the doorbell. By referencing the *Alien* franchise, *À l'intérieur* brings to the fore ideas regarding monstrous births and anxieties concerning the reproductive capacity of women *(see fig 4.11)*.[126] However, for Sarah, this scene points to anxieties towards her own permeability and position as a boundary between the outside world (that her baby will ultimately be born into) and her womb (where her baby currently resides). As this analysis has already established, Sarah is closed off from others and has

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[126] See Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous Feminine,* (1993) for her reading of the famous chest-bursting sequence as a reworking of the primal scene where the male body is made grotesque by taking on female attributes (19).

created a safe place that is defined by the separation of herself and the outside world, both emotionally and physically. Giving birth threatens to tear this boundary (in other words, Sarah herself) irreparably apart.

The intersection where interiors and exteriors collide and are consequently blurred to the point of being indefinable is a position *À l'intérieur* creates for the viewer through the use of sound. *À l'intérieur* uses low frequencies as well as high ones. When Sarah's intruder, known only as La Femme,[127] first appears outside her window, a low pulsating beat begins, emulating both the heartbeat and threatening approach of a predator. High frequencies do not emerge until La Femme first attacks Sarah, at which point loud and high-pitched fast staccato notes explode like rapid

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[127] La Femme may be read as relating to the archaic mother, particularly in regards to Roger Dadoun's formulation of the concept where, in 'Fetishism in the Horror Film,' he suggests the figure of Dracula links to the 'omnipresent and all-powerful totality' of the archaic mother as his penetrating look and rigid posture renders him substitute for the mother's phallus (1989: 54). Béatrice Dalle, as La Femme, has a striking physicality in this respect and the character links to vampirism in more ways than aesthetics. No longer able to give birth herself, she resolves to steal the life of another. Alternatively, the figure may not substitute her inability to procreate but rather her powers to destroy. Creed, drawing on Susan Lurie (1981-2) suggests that the 'mother's phallus-fetish' (to the extent we accept that La Femme's actions and aesthetics present her as a substitute for the phallus) covers not her lack but her powers of castration (1993: 22). Equally, she could be understood as the archaic mother herself – her ability to enter the house silently (it is never revealed how she achieves this) and the eerie shots where she lurks ghost-like in the background lend her a mystical and omnipresent aura. She could also serve as a starting point for a discussion of female fetishism, representing the mother who cannot let her child go – see Mary Kelly's article 'Woman-Desire-Image,' for her reading of Freud's ideas on castration fears for women (1984: 31). Such readings may speak to the unnameable thrills of horror and the seductive terror embodied by Dalle's haunting portrayal of La Femme and therefore revealing of how this film constructs a deeply unnerving spectatorship, however it does little to shed light on the ways this film engages with, and disrupts the notions of, the viewer by generating intense physical responses.

Figure 4.11: *À l'intérieur*: **The film brings to the fore anxieties concerning reproduction by referencing Alien and Aliens.**

gunfire, underscored by continuous white noise. This is repeated at short intervals, whenever another attack occurs, eventually resulting in another tone that, as a viewer, seems to fill your head and press against your skull whilst this particular frequency is played. At this point, the viewer's physicality constitutes the film's spectatorship as they are rendered instrument, contributing towards, and existing as, a filmic element.

The film ends following La Femme's final and most disturbing act, where she cuts into Sarah's flesh and womb with a pair of scissors (while Sarah is still alive) and removes her baby. This scene is a climax to an extensive array of mutilating wound-images; *À l'intérieur* in no way omits the process of mutilation. However, without the sequence of anticipation, there is no circuitous narrative pattern that ends with an element of release. Each wound serves as a further attack for a spectatorship that is

stretched to its limits as both sound and image continually and persistently splits the viewer as subject/object, perceiver/perceived, body/instrument. The final image shows La Femme and baby – Sarah's interior and exterior – brought together through the obliteration of the boundary that separated them (the fact that Sarah's waters broke when La Femme first entered the house and attacked Sarah reinforces the idea of two opposing forces collapsing and thus obliterating that which would define them as separate). Through an identification formed dominantly by high frequencies, the film has excruciatingly placed the viewer at the intersection of notions of embodiment and technology, subject and object, body and text. The only relief is when the film ends.
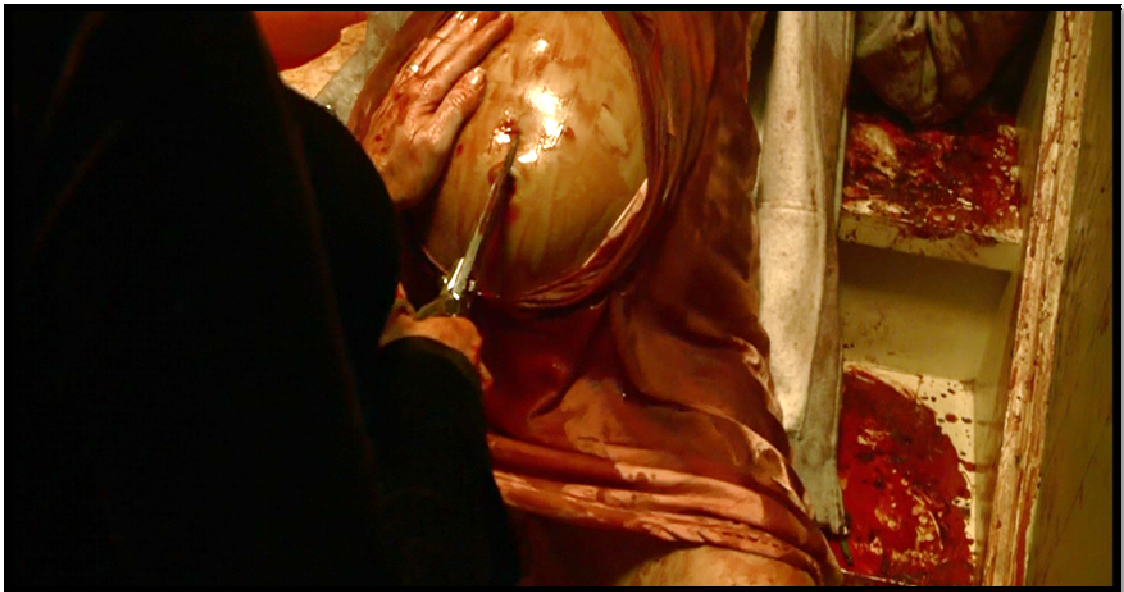
Figure 4.12: *À l'intérieur*: **By omitting circuitous narrative sequences of repeated climax-release, the spectatorship is stretched to its limits.**

With the use of sound that pervades the film, but resists a connection with a particular image, *Irréversible* and *À l'intérieur* articulate the fates of their victims with a physical spectatorship that penetrates, invades and emerges from the viewer to

the point where the reversibility of the film-viewer dynamic is made painfully explicit. With low sounds, an identification is made, not with what the sound signifies, but with what it generates. Anxiety and nausea, as a construction of the film's spectatorship, are grounded in the viewer's body while also tying the viewer strongly to Alex's status as raped. With high frequencies, the viewer identifies themselves as instrument as they emit sounds, not only subverting distinctions of spectator and viewer, but the mechanics of film and the flesh-and-blood body in the theatre. Although these films' soundtracks fall on opposite ends of the sound spectrum, they both displace the burden of objectification onto the viewer and destabilise (or overthrow entirely) the distinction between film and self.

<u>Chapter Five: The Gut</u>

A psychologically barren ENS becomes implausible when we consider one noteworthy aspect of the gut: that it is one of the most important means by which the outside world connects with the body (Wilson, 2004: 43-44).

A tall slim man in a white doctor's coat and knee high leather boots is striding around a leaf-strewn lawn as mist rolls across the grass and around his legs. The wide-angle medium-long shot transforms the space into a stage, placing the camera and spectator in the distanced position of an audience in the theatre that belies the forceful visceral response this particular scene invokes *(see fig 5.1)*. Central to this stage is a twelve limbed beast made of three people who are attached to each other by their mouths and anuses. Just prior to this moment, the front segment, Katsuro, had begun, much to his despair, to defecate. Veins bulge in Katsuro's face and neck, as medium close-ups show his strained resistance against the inevitable. The camera moves down his back to bring into frame Lindsay, the middle segment, who, with moist bloodshot eyes widened in terror, pushes her hand against Katsuro's bandaged backside in a vain attempt to avoid the human waste that is slowly making its way towards, and into, her mouth and gullet. The towering man continues to pace around the sorry creature, gleefully ordering in a deep and authoritative voice for the front section to 'feed her', and for the middle segment to 'swallow it'. Wet tactile sound effects provide a soundtrack for the bowels over medium close-ups of Lindsay's

throat convulsing, her body helplessly defying her will as she ingests what would ordinarily be expelled.

As I watch the scene described above for the first time, my fingernails scratch the surface of my desk, and my body rocks back and forth in a futile attempt at self-soothing. I hear the distant whine of a voice uttering again and again, 'I don't want to, I don't want to', before I realise it is my own. Finally, in a mixture of horror and relish, my back arches, my shoulders hunch forward and my chest heaves as I retch once, twice, three times.

Figure 5.1: *Human Centipede*: **The wide angle shot transforms the space into a stage.**

I begin this chapter with a description of the notorious scene in Tom Six's *The Human Centipede: First Sequence* (2009, hereafter referred to as *Human Centipede*), and a personal account of my own viewing experience, because it serves as an entry

point to my concerns at various levels. Firstly, in reviews, discussions and videos posted online,[128] this particular scene is continually reproduced through various accounts of audience reactions and, as such, often functions as an avenue along which the film is discussed. Further to this, it is frequently the deciding factor amongst those yet to see the film ('I must watch this film' or, 'I must avoid this film at all costs'). Second, in methodological terms, it is this scene (and my reaction to it) that affirmed my decision to include *Human Centipede* in my thesis as a case study (along with its sequel, *The Human Centipede II: Full Sequence* (Tom Six, 2011)) and pushed me to consider the part my gut plays in engaging with film. Finally, theoretically, this moment in the film, and the physical response it generates, is the point at which primary concerns of this project – notions of spectator and viewer, subjects and objects, and interiors and exteriors – are at their most complex.

So far in this thesis, I have interrogated modes of spectatorship that problematise the distinction between viewer and spectator. The disturbing nature of films such as the *Saw II – 3D,*(Darren Lynn Bousman, 2005, 2006, 2007 David Hackl, 2008, Kevin Greutert, 2009, 2010), *Hostel,* (Eli Roth, 2005), *Dans Ma Peau,*(Marina de Van,

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[128] In discussion boards online, people who both liked and hated the film debate the notorious scene where Lindsay is forced to swallow faeces; concerns include whether it is evidence of the director's or audience's perversity, whether it is necessary, and whether it was actually shocking or just boring: http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1467304/board/; http://uk.gamespot.com/forums/topic/27307454; Reviews often consider that one big 'gross-out' idea is not enough to make up for an otherwise disappointing film, while also detailing the defecation film and providing diagrams (stills from the film) of it: http://www.cinemablend.com/reviews/The-Human-Centipede-4594.html; http://blog.moviefone.com/2010/05/07/beyond-anguish-the-human-centipede-review/; http://www.dvdtalk.com/reviews/43497/human-centipede-the/; http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20100505/REVIEWS/100509982; Reaction videos film people who are watching the scene. Recording the reactions of people watching disgusting or scary videos are fairly common practice, the most famous example being, arguably, '2 girls, 1 cup': http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=53I8NHT4OHA; http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GL7DEsClIDY; http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j2QtSElOYd0; http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oNKaMyWm-kA All last accessed 10.03.2013.

2002), *Irréversible* (Gaspar Noé, 2002) and *À l'intérieur* (Alexandre Bustillo and Julian Maury, 2007), lies not only in the mutilated body that is so prevalent in these texts, but also in the way various assumed structures and dichotomies are ruptured and subverted by the physical responses they generate. In one of the more climactic moments in *Human Centipede*, where Dr Heiter's dream of joining separate organisms together by way of the digestive system is in the process of becoming a possibility, the subject is mutilated not through fragmentation or dissection, but by the obliteration of the defined body. Regression (or anxieties about it), to a pre-unified subjectivity, is powerfully expressed through the flesh conjoined rather than the flesh disintegrated. As a consequence, each body becomes a segment, incomplete in itself and objectified. Orifices of the body become enclosed networks, more akin to the stomach or intestines than mouth and anus. Further, these body parts that are normally distant, in this moment meet in both space and function: the anus provides nutrition as well as waste, and this is passed through the mouth as both excrement and food. Finally, exteriors and interiors collapse in me, the gut of the viewer, as the burning taste of bile, and unnerving tremors of my stomach, make visible to me those organs that ordinarily escape consciousness. In this chapter, I aim to theorise that which often escapes analysis in relation to film spectatorship: those body parts that make up the gastrointestinal tract, or the gut, that are brought into play in films designed to revolt.

What exactly do we mean when we talk about the gut, and why is it so frequently absent in film analysis? Firstly, this term does not just refer to the concrete body. Rather, the gut blurs notions of physicality with abstract feelings, frequently thought

of as instinct or intuition.[129] It is a feeling that is inexplicable, to the extent that it is difficult to capture in language, evades conscious thought and confuses the distinction between the cerebral and corporeal. Yet, in concrete bodily terms, the gut makes an appearance in populist discourses of film viewing. A film may make a viewer feel 'shit-scared' or make them claim they could 'shit their pants'. Alternatively, it may arouse the anxiety of and/or desire to vomit (and, in rare and extreme circumstances, the act of vomiting).[130] In these instances, film is inviting a consciousness of a system that extends beyond the mouth and anus that, on a general day to day basis, usually escapes notice.[131] In her exploration of the gut in *Psychosomatic: Feminism and the Neurological Body,* Elizabeth Wilson explains that although the entire digestive tract, from mouth to anus, is encased in a network of nerves called the enteric nervous system (ENS), the parts that are 'most often available to consciousness' (the upper portions of the stomach, oesophagus and anorectum) is innervated by the central nervous system (CNS) (2004: 37). Therefore, although it is not unusual to be aware, or even hyper-aware, of the need or desire to vomit, defecate, or the discomfort of an upset stomach, it is rare for the lower

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[129] In her book *Tactile Eye,* Jennifer Barker also comments on the dual meaning of the gut, which she refers to as viscera in order to capture the vague impressions we have of our internal organs. She states '[b]y our "visceral" reaction to a film we often mean our "gut reaction," a general feeling that begins deep inside but makes its way to the surface,' (2009: 122). I would suggest that focus is, more often than not, on the reaction that has made its way to the surface; I aim to explore this response before it enters our conscious thought.

[130] By this logic, film may even induce the anxiety or act of defecation (as it does fictionally in *The Human Centipede 2: Full Sequence,* Tom Six, 2011), although I have never experienced this nor heard of any such accounts. I have, however, had the experience of anxiety that a film may cause me to urinate. While watching *Paranormal Activity 3* (Henry Joost, Ariel Schulman, 2011) at the cinema I desperately needed to urinate but did not want to miss any of the film. As it is a film that delights in making the viewer 'jump', and I am happily susceptible to this reaction, I feared too violent a jolt would cause the tensed muscles that were keeping me dry and socially decent to momentarily loosen their grip. This anxiety was further strained against my reluctance to disengage from the film sufficiently to avoid enjoying its 'startle effects'. This is, of course, not a physical response entirely generated by the film, as it was the result of my biological state prior to the screening; however, it did have the effect of making me hyper-aware of the film's manipulations of my physical state and the extent to which I was able (or unable) to control this engagement.

[131] In the introduction to this thesis, I referenced Laura Marks (2000) who observes that, were we to be acutely aware of everything that occurred in our bodies, we would not be able to function fully on a day to day basis. This chapter explores how the *Human Centipede* films momentarily capture this state of hyper-bodily awareness by signifying and locating the filmic gut in the body of the viewer.

portions of the stomach, small intestine and upper colon (those parts innervated by the ENS and also involved in the sensation of nausea and the acts of vomiting and defecation) to enter conscious thought, unless they are called to our attention through ill health. Even as these organs are stimulated by the film, because the ENS can act independently of the CNS (Wilson, 2004: 34), it is unlikely for the viewer to consequently become conscious of these particular sections of the gut. In this way, the ENS and CNS speak to theories of the unconscious and conscious mind, with nausea and vomit arising as hysterical symptoms of a hidden turbulence. This chapter aims to look further than the hyperbolic claims described above to question if, and how, *Human Centipede* and *Human Centipede II* bring to the fore less visible sectors of the gut, and in what way this interrogates the relationships between spectator, viewer and film.

Although I began this chapter with a narrative of my own personal viewing experience, there are often underlying reservations in placing too much import on such an individual and specific account. However, I would argue that it is particularly apt for discussions attempting to bring light onto and into the gut. In the introduction to *Carnal Thoughts,* Vivian Sobchack criticises the notion of talking about the body as if it were 'an abstracted object belonging always to someone else', referring instead to the lived body, meaning 'what it is to be "embodied" and to live our animated and metamorphic existences as the concrete, extroverted, and spirited subjects we all objectively are' (2004: 1). It is this lived body that I attempted to express with 'tactile foresight' rather than 'visual hindsight' to construct an understanding of the processual logic of *Human Centipede* (64). Sobchack argues 'that autobiographical and anecdotal material' are not 'merely a fuzzy and subjective

substitute for rigorous and objective analysis' but instead provide the 'premises for a more processual, expansive, and resonant materialist logic' (6). With the inclusion of my own 'anecdote', I explore the extent to which such an account opens up film analysis to allow for my own corporeal being. Further, by drawing attention to the equivocal nature of existence (metamorphic concrete, objective subjects) we may also consider the complications between notions of spectator and viewer that the mutilation film highlights.

The *Human Centipede* films are by no means alone, or even original, in their ability to invoke the sensation of nausea and, potentially, the reflex of vomiting. Such a physical response is highly subjective, although, recently, certain styles of film-making have reportedly induced widespread nausea and, occasionally, vomiting. For example, Matt Reeves' *Cloverfield* (2008) caused audiences to feel nauseated and, in some circumstances, vomit (to such an extent that theatres began to warn cinema-goers before they entered the screenings). These reactions have since been put down to motion sickness; *Cloverfield* is filmed entirely with a handheld camera.[132] Similar to nausea and anxiety induced by the use of sub-bass frequencies in *Irréversible* (Gaspar Noé, 2002), feeling sick and/or throwing up due to prolonged exposure to shaky camera-work is, to a degree, a non-object related response, to the extent to

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[132]The following links are a sample of the large amount reviews, reports and medical and pseudo-medical explanations of audience responses to *Cloverfield*. http://www.webmd.com/brain/news/20080122/whats-behind-cloverfield-illness; http://articles.cnn.com/2008-01-24/health/movie.sickness_1_motion-sickness-vertigo-viewers?_s=PM:HEALTH; http://floridaventureblog.com/2008/01/1st-cloverfield-review-it-will-make-you.html; http://www.thatsfit.com/2008/01/23/did-you-get-sick-watching-cloverfield/; http://digitaljournal.com/article/249299 (accessed 04.12.12) More recently, there have been complaints of nausea and vomit from viewers of Peter Jackson's *The Hobbit* (2012) when played at 48 frames per second (as opposed to the contemporary convention of 24 frames per second). See http://www.businessinsider.com/the-hobbit-causing-nausea-and-dizziness-2012-12 and the response made by Warner Bros. http://blastr.com/2012/12/what-nausea-wb-responds-t.php Last accessed 08.03.2013.

which the method of filming may escape conscious perception as the action and suspense narrative takes central focus. In this instance, the affect of nausea (as it becomes detached from its source: the cinematography) is perceived as arising from within the self. The film's spectatorship is thus constituted as the viewer and undermines the distinction between text and audience. However, this chapter is concerned with the nausea and vomit-reaction generated by a very specific object: faeces.[133] This chapter asks: how do faeces generate the physical responses of sickness and throwing up? How do these responses complicate the notions of spectator and viewer, and viewer and film? Do these responses constitute a viewer that extends beyond the everyday consciousness of bodily existence? How does the gut push us to consider, extend or break the parameters set on film-viewing (seeing, hearing and, more recently, touching)? With these questions in mind, I turn to a close textual analysis of *Human Centipede*, with reference to *Human Centipede II*.

Human Centipede has an altogether singular premise. The protagonist of this film, Dr Heiter, is a retired surgeon, famous for his pioneering work on the separation of Siamese twins. Having grown tired of splitting subjects, he now desires to create a new creature by joining humans together. He thus embarks upon the notion of a human centipede, an organism connected via the digestive system. By kidnapping three unsuspecting victims, and performing surgery to connect them mouth to anus,

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[133] Another film I considered including in this chapter is *Feed* (Brett Leonard, 2005) because of its nausea-inducing spectatorship. Like the *Human Centipede* films, disgust is, in part, generated through the ingestion of something which, culturally, should not be ingested (in this instance, liquefied corpses). However, I think the more dominant object of disgust in this film is food. It follows a man who has an obsession with feeding women until they die of complications with obesity (and thereafter liquefying their bodies and feeding them to his next victim). The women are, up until the end, willing victims, and take great pleasure in the food they are given. There is something disgusting about the excess of food (and desire for it) that I consider plays an important part in generating feelings of nausea. This would best be considered in relation to concepts of socio-moral disgust that is deeply entwined with physical disgust. As such, it does not quite fit into the remits of this chapter.

he is able to give birth to his vision. The climax of both the film and his triumph occurs when the front segment of the centipede is forced to defecate into the mouth of the second, thereby unifying each section into one whole subject. In spite of the association with human excrement and hideous disfigurement (besides the obvious, the victims are further mutilated because, in order to attach a mouth to an anus, the teeth and lips have to be removed and the buttocks must be carved into to create attaching folds), the film is presented as strikingly clinical. The colour palette is made up of stark whites, muted browns, cool greys and light and dark blues. An abstract painting of Siamese twins, in Dr Heiter's living room, that glows hues of pink, red and orange in the fire it reflects, are the only colours and warmth that throw this cold atmosphere into relief *(see fig 5.2).* Long, slow tracking shots and zooms, along with the doctor's measured movements and meticulous personal presentation, complete a calm, soothing and composed tone that is entirely contrary to the events that unfold.

Figure 5.2: *Human Centipede*: **The warm tones of the painting throw relief onto the otherwise muted palette.**

Human Centipede II is the antithesis to the original. Whereas the first film is in colour, the second is shot almost entirely in black and white. Where *Human Centipede* has a muted and washed out palette, its sequel is deeply textured, oscillating between high contrast lighting and low contrast that blends murky and grainy shades of grey. *Human Centipede* is filmed with a steadicam, creating a calm and controlled atmosphere befitting of the protagonist who lives in immaculate surroundings. *Human Centipede II* is filmed entirely with a hand-held camera, corresponding with the disarray of the protagonist's life and mental state. As already stated, *Human Centipede* is clinical in its presentation – the sharp edges and straight lines of the surgeon's home emphasise the clear-cut boundary of the cinema screen. *Human Centipede II* blurs these edges with dark shadings in the corners of the frame *(see fig 5.3)*. The style of editing in the sequel further lends to its surreal atmosphere; frequently, shots are not seamlessly tied together within the filmic space. Although subtle, this strength of cut serves to create a gap between each image that suggests instability at the very structure of the film. Rather than creating movement, such a style fabricates cracks in the materiality of the film and in the perceived reality of (and spectatorial investment in) the film world. In spite of these distinctive aesthetics and, in particular, the different audio-visual techniques that represent the gut during the climactic defecation scene in the original and its sequel, both films bring the gut into being by an affective response to a generalised and unconscious embodied shock. How this is done will be explored through the following analyses.

Figure 5.3 *Human Centipede II*: Darky grainy textures blur the edges of the image and frame.

Human Centipede begins peacefully with a slow sideways tracking shot that presents a highway under the bright sun. On the side of the road, in a car, sits Dr Heiter, dabbing his eyes while holding a photograph of three dogs lined up with their noses pushed up against each other's backsides *(see fig 5.4)*. The camera follows a truck driver who, holding a roll of toilet paper, enters the outskirts of the forest that lines the motorway. As he pulls down his trousers, the film cuts to the doctor, who is now standing in an intense shaft of sunlight and aiming a rifle at the driver. This opening scene presents itself as both strange and familiar for a number of reasons. A motorway under the bright sun does not ordinarily lend itself to a setting for murder. The photograph of the dogs remains, for the time being, unexplained. The roll of toilet paper, which points towards the truck driver needing to relieve his bowels, adds an almost childish humour to the scene that is in sharp contrast with the danger he finds himself in. Yet, the doctor's characterisation is a familiar one. His movements are calm and measured, and he tracks his prey silently and slowly; he

does not need to rush, suggesting his confidence in his ability to command the situation. His disposition recalls killers akin to Michael Myers (*Halloween,* John Carpenter, 1978), one of the original silent stalkers that consequently became so influential for the horror genre.[134]

Figure 5.4: *Human Centipede*: **This strange photograph is initially left unexplained.**

The film continues to pay its debt to the history of horror cinema in a variety of ways. After the opening sequence, the film follows two North American teenagers, Lindsay and Jenny, who are travelling across Europe on holiday. Tourists have been

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[134] Although Michael Myers is arguably the most famous stalking killer, and *Halloween* is often the film credited with beginning the slasher genre which spawned films such as the *Friday the 13th* franchise (the original directed by Sean S. Cunningham, 1980), *My Bloody Valentine* (George Mihalka, 1981), *Hell Night* (Tom DeSimone, 1981) *The House on Sorority Row* (Mark Rosman, 1983), and *Silent Night, Deadly Night* (Charles E. Sellier Jr., 1984) amongst many others, it is inarguable that these films hold a great debt to Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) due to the self-consciousness many slasher films have of psychoanalytical (film) theory. Further, Bob Clark's *Black Christmas* (1974), where a house of sorority girls and their house mother are picked off one by one by an unknown killer, precedes *Halloween* by 4 years. In her book *Men Women and Chainsaws: Gender in Modern Horror Film* (1992), Carol Clover credits Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* (1960) as the original slasher film. With the characterisation of Dr Heiter, *Human Centipede* thus pays its debt to a long and complex history of horror cinema.

falling prey to an extensive array of killers and monsters for many decades; this continues to be a staple of contemporary horror cinema and is frequently seen in the mutilation film (the *Wrong Turn* franchise (Rob Schmidt, Joe Lynch, Declan O'Brien, 2003-2012), *Hostel, Hostel II* (Eli Roth, 2005, 2007) *Wolf Creek* (Greg Mclean, 2005)*, Manhunt* (Patrick Syverson, 2008), *Break* (Matthias Olof Eich, 2009)*, Hostel III* (Scott Spiegel, 2011)). Lindsay and Jenny are presented as naïve, scantily clad young women and provided with what can only be described as forced and contrived dialogue and narrative. On their way to a party they get lost, their car breaks down, their phone loses signal and they end up stumbling through a wood hindered both by high heels and torrential rain. The actors' performances in these scenes are entirely unconvincing, which completes the stereotype of the (female) horror film victim.[135] While stumbling through the forest they happen across an isolated house. The house itself points to both Gothic[136] horror, and the slasher genre.[137] The inhabitant of the house, Dr Heiter, is himself a cliché with his thick

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[135] The fact that their acting, and the film's dialogue, later greatly improves suggests that this was a conscious decision on the part of the director. In his director's commentary, Tom Six explains how he used clichés such as a car breaking down and phones losing signal to lure the viewer into thinking they were watching a generic horror film before confronting them with the centipede, thereby intensifying the film's shock value. I suggest it goes further than this to create a sense of unease through the mixture of strange and familiar, as well as underlining and amplifying the tension between the notions of spectator and viewer.

[136] In his book *Gothic,* Fred Botting describes the settings of Gothic horror thus: 'The major locus of Gothic plots, the castle, was gloomily predominant in early Gothic fiction. Decaying, bleak and full of hidden passageways, the castle was linked to other medieval edifices – abbeys, churches and graveyards especially – that, in their generally ruinous states, harked back to a feudal past associated with barbarity, superstition and fear' (1996: 2-3). However, as he goes on to argue, Gothic iconography changed according to contemporary concerns and the castle 'gradually gave way to the old house' (3). As a highly modern and new house, the setting for the horrors in *Human Centipede* firmly situates itself in the present day while at the same time acknowledging its influences and pulling the Gothic into the contemporary physical mutilation film.

[137] Clover identifies particular elements of the slasher film. The (usually male) killer is often notable for lasting childhood issues, often with a sexual dimension (1992: 27-30). There is no overt suggestion that Dr Heiter has any psychological difficulties stemming from his childhood or sexual development; however, his bizarre obsession with sewing people together by their mouths and anuses call upon Freudian concepts of the anal and oral stage, thereby aligning Dr Heiter with developmental problems that he is transferring onto others. One of the main differences here is that Dr Heiter does not wish to kill, only to transform. This is an original idea over a well-known convention lends an uncanny aura to the doctor's ambitions. Action most often occurs in what Clover calls the 'terrible place,' 'most often a house or tunnel, in which victims sooner or later find themselves' (30). She also

foreign accent (recalling to viewers familiar with the history of horror film the performances of Bela Lugosi in such iconic films as *Dracula* (Tod Browning, 1931) and *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (Robert Florey, 1932), and his position as a man well versed in medical science harbouring delusions of grandeur and desires to manipulate nature (clearly a member of the 'mad doctor' clan, of which Frankenstein is the most famous).[138] Finally, the eponymous centipede, although highly original by the way very particular human parts have been stitched together, is not the first creature in cinema created by an (arguably) insane genius in the basement of his home. Therefore, *Human Centipede* may initially present itself as a new breed of horror film, but is in actuality a bizarre assortment of well-known, much loved and thoroughly theorised horror sub-genres.[139] However, it is in their presentation that *Human Centipede* generates a peculiar sense of uneasiness and plays with the tension between notions of spectator and viewer.

Various aspects of *Human Centipede* are only recognisable as Gothic horror film tropes on closer inspection, such as the house, the experiment, the cellar and the mad

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states that this place might initially 'seem a safe haven, but … once the killer penetrates them, the walls … hold the victim in' (31). This pattern can be seen in *Human Centipede* as Lindsay and Jenny initially run to Dr Heiter's house to escape from the dark woods and the rain, only to find themselves at the hands of a psychotic doctor. Clover also observes that the choice of weapon determines a level of proximity between victim and killer – for example, knives, needles and hammers are preferred over guns (31-32). Dr Heiter's weapons (his needle and scalpel) *and* method of, not killing as I have mentioned, but incapacitating, inspires closeness, both between him and his victims and between the victims themselves. There is also a final girl, Lindsay, who actively fought the doctor from the beginning of her capture. Rather than emerging from the ordeal somewhat shaken but otherwise intact, Lindsay is left disfigured and suspended between two corpses. *Human Centipede,* therefore, takes one of the more 'positive' or optimistic aspects of the slasher film, and renders it helpless and hopeless.

[138] The 'mad-doctor' blueprint dates back in cinema to *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (Robert Weine, 1920) at least, and in literature to Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) and H. G. Wells' *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896); however its remake in 2005 of the same name (directed by David Lee Fisher) and films such as *Splice* (Vincenzo Natali, 2009), *The Skin I Live In* (Pedro Almodóvar, 2011, a loose remake of Georges Franju's iconic *Les Yeux Sans Visage* (1960)) and, of course, *Human Centipede,* suggest that this is still a popular and much drawn-upon formula.

[139] As already stated, these include the 'mad-doctor' films, as well as early 20th Century horror and the slasher film.

doctor. These iconic referents have had a veneer of originality placed over them by being both unusual and very familiar. Ordinarily, if a future horror film victim comes across a place of residence in an isolated setting, it is conventional to expect it to be either classically eerie i.e. a huge castle with labyrinthine corridors, locked doors and shadowy crevices, or strongly evident of the perversity of its owner, perhaps a couch made of human bones, a jar filled with eyeballs, corpses taking the place of ornaments.[140] Dr Heiter's house is, in contrast, modern in style, consisting of clean, straight lines and entire walls made of glass. Far from being dark, murky and practically uninhabitable, it is bright, clean and, in any other circumstance, a welcoming atmosphere from which to find relief from the rain. Dr Heiter conducts his experiments in his basement, but this is not a mess of laboratory equipment with snaking tubes filled with bubbling liquids of unknown origin, nor is it overflowing with vapour or home to grandiose machines with giant levers and switches controlled by a bordering hysteric. It is well-lit and spotless; the victims reside on hospital beds with professionally applied drips and they are operated on, under anaesthetic, with sterile-looking scalpels wielded by the hands of a practiced and unruffled specialist. Thus, *Human Centipede* brings the Gothic into the present day.[141]

Gothic fiction has long shown its proficiency in mutating according to its era. Fred Botting, in his book *Gothic,* claims that Gothic narratives 'never escaped the concerns of their own times' (1996: 3), meaning that they are apt to change, where

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[140] For example, the rural estate in *The Ghoul* (Freddie Francis, 1975), and the house filled with human bones used as ornaments and furniture in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, 1974).
[141] In this, *Human Centipede,* in spite of its bizarre storyline, shares common ground with contemporary films that draw on Gothic themes and iconography, for example, *Splice,* and a number of remakes that signal a revived interest in the Gothic, such as *The Skin I Live In*, *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari,* and *The Wolfman* (Joe Johnston, 2010)

appropriate, from a dark castle to an old house, for example.[142] However, in an article published in an edited collection on Gothic fiction in 2002, 'Aftergothic,' Botting laments that it has now become 'too familiar after two centuries of repetitive mutation and seems incapable of shocking anew' (298). Yet I would argue that *Human Centipede* has succeeded considerably in its (clear) intention to shock[143] and has done so partly by incorporating Gothic iconographies into a contemporary setting. In her book *Contemporary Gothic,* Catherine Spooner questions whether this is possible because Gothic 'components can be reordered in infinite combinations, because they provide a lexicon that can be plundered for a hundred different purposes, a crypt of body parts that can be stitched together in myriad different permutations' (2006: 156). This last notion is especially true of *Human Centipede* and to what Spooner terms Contemporary Gothic that is 'more obsessed with bodies than in any of its previous phases' (2006: 63). Gothic particularly relevant to *Human Centipede* is when it articulates the 'anachronistic survivals of the past into the present' (2006: 155)[144] through its iconographies with a different style, as described above. This is nowhere more prevalent than in the surgical scene, where Dr Heiter gives birth to his creation.

The surgical scene in *Human Centipede* speaks to well-worn and well-practiced anxieties about subjectivity but expresses them in a slightly, yet very significantly, different way. Rather than tearing apart one person, or bringing together fragments

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[142] Botting states: 'In later fiction, the castle gradually gave way to the old house then: as both building and family line, it became the site where fears and anxieties returned to the present. These anxieties varied according to diverse changes: political revolution, industrialisation, urbanisation, shifts in sexual and domestic organisation, and scientific discovery' (1996: 3), implying that where there are anxieties, there is room for the Gothic.

[143] I am measuring this intention in terms of the director's comments and its success by reviews, discussions and video responses referenced above.

[144] As Spooner states, this is one of the theories that attempts to distinguish and define Gothic.

of many individuals, the centipede is created by joining (almost) whole bodies in an attempt to create one entirely new and original being. In doing so, *Human Centipede* takes elements of the Gothic and aesthetics of a more contemporary cinema to create a new breed of horror and fascination, unnerving in its strange familiarity.

The scene begins with a low-angle shot, forcing the spectator to look up towards the doctor as he stands above the camera in a position of omnipotence *(see fig 5:5)*. This effect is enhanced by his surgical outfit – a uniform that inspires both respect and fear as those who wear it often hold life and death in their hands. Indeed, Dr Heiter's hands, and the blurred notions of life and death, figure predominantly in this scene. The colours, like much of the rest of the film, are muted, and restricted to shades of white, blue and green, giving a clinical minimalism to the scene. The sound of surgery is foregrounded with the slow beeping of a heart rate monitor and the abject noise of artificial breath; enhancing the disturbing nature of these sounds that inspire anxieties arising from the confusion of certain binaries (life/death, human/machine) is a quiet, echoing high pitch note resonating across and through the soundscape. The lighting shows the imperfections and blemishes on the patients' skin, and renders it a dull grey. This, along with the fact their eyes are open yet they are unconscious, provokes the idea that they are dead, or *un*dead, again playing on the uncertainty of the boundary between life and death.[145]

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[145] In this way, *Human Centipede* speaks to contemporary anxieties regarding death – in her book *Fear: A Cultural History,* Joanna Bourke argues that current fears towards death centre on the 'actual physical process' of dying rather than its aftermath, which would have been a more prominent anxiety in 'past generations' and, further, advances in medical care and technologies (such as organ transplants and life-support systems) have produced uncertainties regarding *when* death occurs (2005, 315-316). The fate of being made into a human centipede calls upon these fears regarding *how* one dies, including the indignities that may come with it, and *when* one dies – does Jenny die at the end, or is she already dead when the Doctor attempts to strip her of her individuation?

Figure 5.5: *Human Centipede*: **Low angle shots construct the omnipotence of Dr Heiter.**

Manipulating this now blurred and unrecognisable boundary is the doctor who, as if he is a performer, makes slow theatrical hand gestures before marking his patients and making incisions. His performance takes centre stage, overshadowing the mutilation that occurs at his hands *(see fig 5.6)*. When the teeth, one of the more sensitive parts of the body,[146] are removed, the camera remains on the doctor, still at a low-angle, as he reaches down below the frame and expresses physical exertion through narrowed eyes, hunched up shoulders and small gasps of breath. The reverse-shot reveals no more detail of mutilation as the doctor's hands obscure the spectacle and his groans cover the sounds of roots ripping from flesh.

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[146] That representations of certain body parts generate corporeal mimicry more readily, that is, they are projected onto the surface of the viewer to invoke the sensation of discomfort or pain, is of course something that is capitalised on by a large number of films across many genres. Three instances that stand out particularly for me is the pavement scene in *American History X* (Tony Kaye, 1998)*,* the tongue-cutting scene in *Oldboy* (Park Chan-wook, 2003)*,* and, indirectly, the knife-dildo in *Se7en* (David Fincher, 1995).

Figure 5.6: *Human Centipede*: Dr Heiter's hands are the point of fascination, rather than the mutilation.

In spite of what occurs during the surgery, this particular scene is striking in its very lack of affect. In contrast to *Hostel* and the *Saw* franchise, processes of identification relating to characters are inhibited largely through the mobilisation of generic clichés (this will be discussed in more detail below). Further, even if this connection had been developed, as Lindsay, Jenny and Katsuro are unconscious throughout the surgery, there would be little chance to invoke anxiety, panic or pain. However, it is not always necessary to depend on character identifications to produce or inhibit affect. In a personal account of her viewing experience of *The Piano* (Jane Campion, 1993)*,* Sobchack suggests that we should think about 'our primary engagement (and the film's) with the sense and sensibility of material itself' (2004: 65). This has the potential to create a detached spectatorship as much as an immersive one. The aesthetic is so cold and clinical it renders the mutilation sanitised. Even bloody images and fatty tissue being cut away from the buttocks are normalised by the

professional surroundings.[147] Most importantly, the typical fascination with mutilated flesh is here displaced onto the doctor. The point of the scene is not the spectacle of flesh but the doctor's ambitions.

The emphasis placed on Dr Heiter's hands and ambitions is starkly contrasted in *Human Centipede II* where the spectacle of flesh is initially formed through the visualisation of Martin. The actor who plays him, Laurence R. Harvey, has an incredible physical presence that is capitalised on throughout the film. Medium close-ups reveal a chubby, baby-like face, huge bulbous eyes and protruding ears often distorted through the use of a fisheye lens *(see fig 5.7)*. In some scenes, he is shown naked, except for a small pair of white underpants, tucked beneath his striking and imposing stomach. Lingering shots of his face and stomach are aligned with revelations of Martin's history – voice-overs that recall sexual abuse at the hands of his father[148] – thereby displacing the horrors of paedophilia and incest onto his corporeality *(see fig 5.8)*. Adding to this repulsive, yet fascinating, construction, Martin is also an avid excretor. He sweats, coughs up phlegm, pisses blood, bleeds, ejaculates and shits his own bed. During the surgery scene in *Human Centipede II,* Martin clearly attempts to take the place of Dr Heiter (who he idolises) as he calmly flourishes his hand in preparation for the first cut. However, instead of immaculate

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[147] Fear, horror, anxiety and disgust may be greatly influenced by the surroundings of the emotion or affect-object. In his book *Philosophy of Horror,* Noël Carroll argues that disgust towards a monster can arise from its association with disgusting things; 'the association of such impure creatures with perceptually pronounced gore or other disgusting trappings is a means for underscoring the repulsive nature of the being' (1990: 52).

[148] 'Stop them tears, you're just making daddy's willy harder.' This line was actually read out by Laurence R. Harvey, the actor that plays Martin.

Figure 5.7: *Human Centipede II*: **The actor who plays Martin has a striking physicality.**

Figure 5.8: *Human Centipede II*: **Martin's stomach is imposing.**

tools and an operation theatre, Martin uses kitchen utensils, duct tape and operates in a rundown warehouse. These props and setting underscore the visual detail of teeth being knocked-out, tendons cut, and fat and muscle deeply hacked; unlike the clinical images of the first film, these visualisations of mutilation overshadow

Martin's pseudo-scientific ambitions as the mutilating wound-image generates

corporeal mimicry, and the unrelenting screams invoke generalised anxiety *(see figs.*

5.9 and 5.10).[149] Although strong victim-identifications have not been constructed,

the surgery scene in *Human Centipede II* holds similarities to the torture sequences

in *Hostel* and *Saw II – 3D*. It has been achieved through the style of the film (jarring

cuts and blurred edges of the image) that already destabilises the film's mode of

spectatorship by drawing attention to the mechanics of film. [150]

Figure 5.9: *Human Centipede II*: **Martin's tools are far more crude and his operations far messier...**

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[149] See Chapter One for a discussion on the scream and anxiety.

[150] Corporeal mimicry is, as I have defined in Chapter One, when the viewer becomes hyper-aware of a particular body part that correlates with the mutilation on the screen, or, more generally, becomes hyper-aware of their own corporeal vulnerability which resonates in a general anxiety directly related to the mutilation on the screen. I have argued that, in certain films, this is intensified through the construction of close identifications with the victims themselves. However, in *Human Centipede II*, an identification with any character is inhibited (largely through its style that calls attention to the mechanics of film). It is not always necessary to identify with the victim of mutilation for physical responses to be generated. Sobchack suggests we rethink processes of identification to include, not just 'subject positions' which she considers secondary, but also a primary identification with the materiality of the film itself (2004: 65). Sobchack also references Laura Marks, who uses the term 'ambient identification', to refer to an identification with the image that is 'not located in a single subject position or self-displacements in narrative characters' (66). The mutilation image, therefore, is located in the corporeality of the viewer. This is intensified in *Human Centipede II* with its jarring cuts and blurred edges of the image, which indicate cracks in the spectator-film engagement and, therefore, draw attention to the materiality of the film.
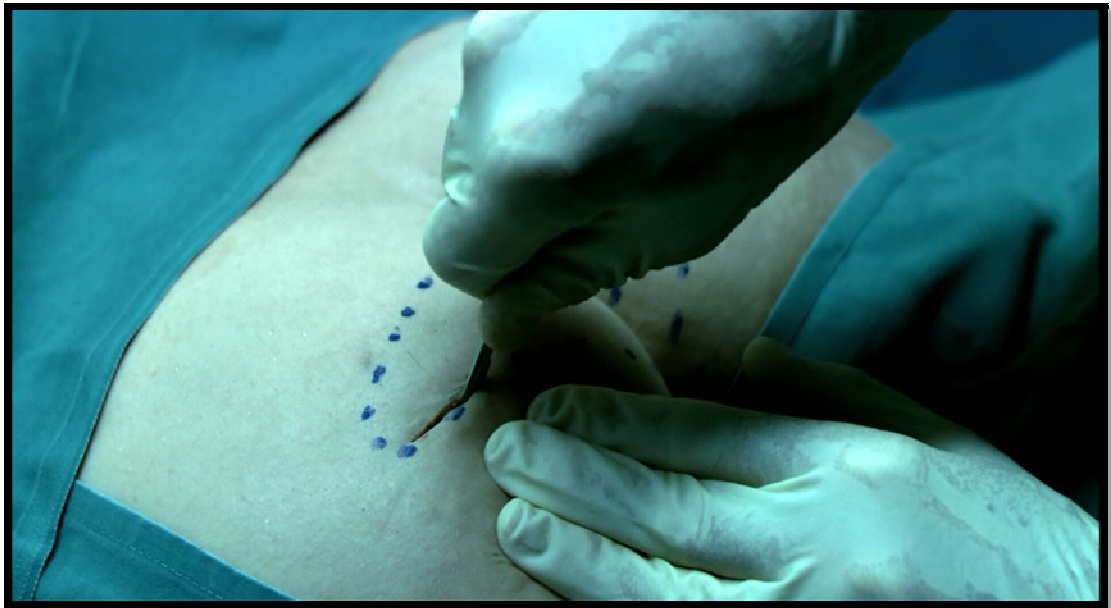
Figure 5.10: *Human Centipede*: ... in comparison with the clinical images of the original.

In his article 'Vile Bodies and Bad Medicine', Pete Boss identifies a trend in 1980s contemporary cinema where surgical operations are a frequent occurrence.[151] Boss states that such scenes can provide cinema with 'material for single instances of graphic gore' (1986: 14). Unlike *Human Centipede II, Human Centipede* does not capitalise on this potential.[152] The focus instead is on the performance of surgery, the technical skill and intellectual aspect of carving into people and sewing/stapling them together. In this way, it also differs from Frankensteinian 'workshop[s] of filthy erection'; rather it is a 'matter-of-fact and routine instance[] of physical

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[151] He references films such as *The Hospital* (Arthur Hiller, 1971), *Marathon Man* (John Schlesinger, 1976), *Coma* (Michael Crichton, 1978), and *Forbidden World* (Allan Holzman, 1984). These films take their cue from Gothic and Frankensteinian horror as well as the surreal *Un Chien Andalou* (Luis Buñuel, 1929) and the poetic *Les Yeux Sans Visage*, as does *Human Centipede*. With this selection of films Boss covers a wide generic field and thus states that he is not attempting to establish a new theory of horror, rather, much as I am attempting to do with the mutilation film, he offers an 'exploration of what appear, sometimes, to be a generically diverse phenomena chosen for their shared articulation of what would appear to be a peculiarly post-modern sense of dread, many of the most fully-realised instances of which are to be found in the horror film' (1986: 15).

[152] The director, Tom Six, states in the DVD commentary for *Human Centipede II,* that he restrained from 'gore' in the first film because he wanted his audience to get used to the idea of people being attached mouth to anus. Once that premise was established, he felt free to embellish his visual style in the sequel.

helplessness' (15). *Human Centipede* has more in common with films such as *Rabid* (David Cronenberg, 1977) which, Boss argues, presents its surgical scene 'in a privileged but wholly detached manner' (16). The fascination is with the doctor's work, with the surgery, with the scientific advancements and how they might be realised. The spectatorship is ocular-specular, which is partly how it achieves a detached viewing position, whereas the sequel complicates this spectator construction by drawing attention to the mechanics of film. Although calling attention to the mechanics of film arguably distances the viewer from the film, it also calls the viewer back to their status as body in the theatre, making the mutilation on-screen forcefully and viscerally affective. Rather than identify with the mutilation as victim as they do in *Hostel* and *Saw II – 3D*, they identify with the mutilation as embodied viewer.

In spite of the lack of affect generated through the surgery scene in *Human Centipede*, the film still holds 'concern with self as body' (Boss, 1986: 16). However, *Human Centipede* stands apart from the films it takes its influences from through its treatment of the human body. Boss states that what is important in the films he cites 'is that [nerves, muscles, arteries, sinews] are recognisable signifiers of the subject's demonstrable physical limitations, being indicative not of a widespread interest in human physiology but of a closing-off or reduction of identity to its corporal horizons' (1986: 15-16). Yet the significance of the surgery scene in *Human Centipede* is not the limitations of physicality but its potential. Although this is strained against the intellect of the doctor and his ambitions – for him to achieve scientific intellectual greatness he must reduce others' identities to their 'corporal horizons' – the focus on his hands and his physical exertions confounds the notion

that his skill is purely cerebral. Further, the centipede itself represents the possibility, rather than limits, of corporeality. Identity here is not reduced to the body, rather it is innervated[153] by the physical modes of existence. *Human Centipede* in this scene is not a cynical expression of the 'closing off' of possibilities, instead it is perversely optimistic towards both the human condition and cinema itself as the centipede represents the film's treatment of the horror genre: conjoining various fragments (and/or wholes) to create a new aesthetic rather than reducing it to its constitutive parts.

By the end of the scene, the doctor is exhausted, and the viewing position shifts from looking up at him as if he were an omnipotent being, to viewing him from a distance, like a student behind the glass in a medical school. A medium-shot shows the centipede on the operation table covered in a green sheet. The doctor uses his elbows to pull the sheet over the centipede's head to avoid marking it with his blood-stained gloves. Part of the post-surgical image is obscured by a doorway which encroaches on the left-hand side of the frame, creating a barrier between the camera and what has just occurred *(see fig 5.11)*. The doctor walks round the centipede, slightly bowed and breathing heavily. The camera tracks slowly to the left, leaving the scene.

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[153] In scientific terms, innervation refers specifically to body parts (for example, to stimulate a nerve to action or supply an organ with nerves). By using it I am attempting to complicate dichotomies that would define identity as separate to bodily functions.

Figure 5.11: *Human Centipede*: **The doorway creates a barrier between viewer/spectator and the surgical scene.**

With its myriad of influences that render various eras of cinema virtually unrecognisable, *Human Centipede* begins by arousing a sense of the uncanny, that is, the presence of different cinematic trends, styles and genres leads the viewer 'back to something long known to [them], once very familiar' (Freud, 1919: 1-2).[154] In this first instance it leads back to the era of horror cinema, where such iconographies were at their most prolific. At a second remove, original iconographies (for example, dark castles and megalomaniacs) were in and of themselves referents to repressed desires and infantile delusions of grandeur and omnipotence. The uncanny constructs an ambivalent spectator who is both repelled and attracted to the film. The simultaneity of detachment or repulsion and immersion, seduction or attraction is

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[154] Freud is critical of Ernst Jentsch's theories of the uncanny, which he outlines in his article 'On the Psychology of the Uncanny' (1906). Freud states that, for Jentsch, the uncanny is related to 'intellectual uncertainty .... The better orientated in his environment a person is, the less readily will he get the impression of something uncanny' (1919: 2). Jentsch's theory does not articulate the strange familiarity *Human Centipede* inspires because, I suggest, this is dependent on particular knowledge of the horror – in other words, the better orientated a viewer is in the history of the horror film, the *more* they will get the impression of something uncanny.

evident throughout the film and its spectatorship. The doctor is both deeply emotionally attached to his creature but retains an authoritative detachment as he disciplines his 'pet'. The centipede itself is three humans forcibly attached yet clearly repelled from one another. The strangely familiar settings and plot both attract and repel the spectator but *Human Centipede* also goes further to underline the instability of the notions 'spectator as construction of the text' and 'viewer as body in the cinema'.

In the scenes where Lindsay and Jenny are lost in the woods,[155] the characters and the situation they are in will be overly familiar to any horror film viewer, and likely familiar to any non-horror film viewer due to the cliché of bad acting and 'dumb' female victims. Such self-referentiality is again a well-known trope of the horror film that underlines the film's consciousness of being part of the genre. However, the self-consciousness on the part of the film is only significant and relevant to the extent that the viewer is conscious of these references (as blatant as they may be). When we speak of the film being self-conscious, therefore, we are really referring to the viewer's consciousness of themselves as a viewer of many films and a member of society/culture in which tropes and clichés exist outside of the cinema and outside of the text.

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[155] *Human Centipede* thus draws influence from horror's (at times) more child-like yet often equally disturbing relative, the fairy-tale, as Lindsay and Jenny recall *Hansel and Gretel* (Brothers Grimm, originally published in 1812) *(see fig 5.12)*.

Figure 5.12: *Human Centipede*: A modern twist on Hansel and Gretel.

The entire premise, as well as the style, of *Human Centipede II* draws attention to the fabrication of cinema, while also confusing the distinction of film and notions of reality. The protagonist, Martin, is a fan of the original film. The sequel, therefore, takes place outside of the filmic world of *Human Centipede*; its diegesis is paralleled with the world conventionally considered to be external to the text, where the body of the viewer in front of the screen presides. Martin is a parody of a certain idea of the horror film fan, speaking to anxieties regarding the mental health of horror's audiences, and the correlation between media and 'real-life' violence.[156] In addition to this, frequent references to psychoanalysis – Martin's psychiatrist, who quickly makes up explicatory accounts for his patient's fantasies, sexually desires Martin and

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[156] Such fears were evident during the height of Hammer Horror, as Peter Hutchings notes in his book *Hammer and Beyond* as he references reviews that suggest horror is for sadists only (1993: 6). The commentary for *Human Centipede II* shows the extent to which film-makers are conscious of these readings and how the films themselves serve as critical responses. For example, director Tom Six refers to the fear that viewers will emulate what they have seen. Actor Laurence Harvey adds that certain reviews he has seen suggest that the figure of Martin is Six's view of the horror film fan (an idea Six vehemently denies, and argues that it is more in tune with mainstream perceptions of horror audiences). The entire premise and extremity of the actions in *Human Centipede II,* as Harvey also points out, serve as a critique of these views.

wears an over-sized beard (a reference to Freud); the design of the centipede, which collapses theories of early developmental stages (oral, anal); Martin's history of sexual abuse at the hands of his father; and his intense hatred for, and consequent murder of, his mother – all firmly, consciously and reflexively situate the film within discourses of psychoanalysis and the horror genre.

Human Centipede, shares with its sequel blatant references that both contextualises the film and draws attention to its status as representation. This is further evidenced in the fascistic figure of Dr Heiter, a German surgeon who revels in the illusion of, and desire for, omnipotence.[157] Martin's attempts to emulate this figure is seen most clearly once he has attached his segments together (somewhat crudely, with staples and duct tape) and succeeds in getting his centipede up and walking. The screams from the surgery have now mercifully ceased. The camera is in a close-up of Martin's blood-spattered back and it tilts up to reveal, over his right shoulder, a ten-segment centipede (he originally envisioned twelve segments, but two of his victims apparently died during their operations).[158] Both a low rumbling and high frequency emerge simultaneously on the soundtrack, and the camera follows Martin as he walks down the line of people attached mouth to anus. As he continues to walk, the screams become audible once again, slowly increasing in volume, only this time they are understandably muffled. In juxtaposition to the previous large number of high

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[157] Dr Heiter's clothes also align him with Germany's fascist history: his knee high leather boots recall the uniform of the SS, and his white doctor's coat recall the doctors who performed horrific experiments. In the DVD commentary, Tom Six reveals that Dr Heiter's character was based on Josef Mengele, the central leader of the experiments.

[158] I say 'apparently' because one of them, a pregnant woman, did not die. This contributes to the climax of the film, when the character runs out of the warehouse as she goes into labour. The woman runs into Martin's car; as she sits in the front seat, she gives birth to her baby. As soon as the child hits the floor of the car, she steps on the accelerator, simultaneously crushing her baby's head and making her escape.

angle shots of Martin, the camera now looks up towards him, creating a God-like figure. He waves his arms as if he is directing an orchestra, while the screams of the centipede distort into a political rally-like cry, enhanced by correlating music. The film cuts to reveal the centipede crawling around Martin in a semi-circle, taking the form of his stage. At this point, Martin is at the climax of his fantasy, finally ready to take position of Dr Heiter, of the omnipotent creator and director.

Through its more blatant references to both the horror film and its discourses, *Human Centipede* and *Human Centipede II* underline their status as representation. In 'Photography and Fetish', Christian Metz argues that the spectator 'knows what a representation is, but nevertheless has a strange feeling of reality (of denial of the signifier)' (1985: 88). The point where the knowledge of film as a representation is coupled with the strange feeling of reality is also where notions of viewer as a body in the theatre and spectator as construction of the text become blurred. The 'strange feeling of reality' is largely generated through what is generally known as 'classical' editing[159] that strives to remain invisible at all times. The spectator is closely tied to the text while at the same time being kept at an arm's length. *Human Centipede* employs this style of editing[160] but undermines it by continuously referring to itself as a representation which, in turn, refers back to the viewer as external to the text, making it difficult to state '*I shall accept this film as reality*' (88, original emphasis). By increasing the gap between film as representation and the 'strange feeling of reality', *Human Centipede* and *Human Centipede II* draw attention to the split nature

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[159] See Chapter One where I discuss this in relation to Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener's conceptualisation of 'ocular-specular' (2010: 14).

[160] Unlike *Human Centipede II,* the style of which continuously draws attention to its status as representation through its jarring editing and images that are blurred and faded around the edges.

of the film-viewing subject and the difficulty in navigating theoretically between spectator and viewer.

Both *Human Centipede* and *Human Centipede II* further complicate boundaries between viewer and spectator, and viewer and film, through a climax created by the scenes these films are famous for. One of the more fascinating aspects of a human centipede is how each segment is nourished sufficiently; the inevitable solution to this dilemma is that, while the front segment is fed, the rest are forced to swallow and digest the faeces of whoever is attached to their mouths.[161] This results, I argue, in a complex shift from unconscious to conscious identifications that blur, then redraw, a line between viewer and film, and biology and technology. In order to explore and define this process, I will draw on ideas, developed by Wilson (2004), that acknowledge the psychology of the gut. First, I want to consider the visceral impact of cinematic faeces on the viewer, and the different ways bowel movements and faeces are represented in each film.

A number of questions are raised by the idea that both *Human Centipede* and *Human Centipede II* achieve a particular visceral engagement between viewer and film through a representation of faeces. Why do faeces, or the suggestion of faeces, have such affective power? How does this scene capitalise on the potential for the representation of faeces to generate an intensely physical response? For me, even to envisage faeces is enough to increase the production of saliva in my mouth, and call

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[161] According to one of the original film's taglines, this is '100% medically accurate'. Tom Six sought medical advice to help him envision a creature that could potentially exist. However, the tagline for the second film is '100% medically *in*accurate'.

my attention to my throat that, in such a moment, becomes an expansive space, too open and too ready to allow the matter into my body. In my imagination, the excrement is entirely other to my body that is, and should be, safely closed off from the world outside.[162] It is this illusion, and the fear of the desire to shatter the illusion, that faeces threatens and invokes, as Julia Kristeva has famously explored in her essay *Powers of Horror.*[163] However, the extent to which the aversion to bodily waste is a response to otherness has been questioned. In his book that explores spectatorship from a cognitive-psychological standpoint, Carl Plantinga notes that many researchers 'agree that disgust has a universal component; visual, tactile, or olfactory contact with rats, cockroaches, urine, feces, and vomit' (2009: 204) and that this can, or should, be explored from an evolutionary standpoint, rather than a psychoanalytical one.[164] Such a view might explain why bodily waste features so highly in films to generate disgust across a range of genres, from Pier Paulo Pasolini's *Salò* (1975), through to 'gross-out' comedies such as *National Lampoon's Animal House* (John Landis, 1978) and the *American Pie* franchise (*American Pie,* (Paul Weitz, 1999), *American Pie 2* (J. B. Rogers, 2001), *American Pie: The Wedding,* Jesse Dylan, 2003), *American Reunion* (Jon Hurwitz and Hayden Schlossberg, 2012)). However, it does not account for the various ways in which these objects may be presented, handled or dealt with in film or why, under some circumstances, the overwhelming response is to laugh, and in others it is the fear (or

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[162] The repetition of the phrase 'my body, my body' is an attempt to reassert myself as defined, stable and individuated; a lingual defence that emerges even upon the mere thought of faeces.

[163] Faeces is, according to this idea, decidedly abject. Kristeva defines the abject as that which 'does not cease challenging its master ... it beseeches a discharge, a convulsion, a crying out .... Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either' (1982: 2).

[164] Plantinga references Charles Darwin who, in the 1870s, 'considered disgust to be an evolved response to things that might harm human prospects for survival', and the British researcher Val Curtis who similarly concludes that resistance to substances such as excrement and vomit protects us against threats to survival, such as disease (2009: 204). See also Gaia Vince, 'Disgust Is Good For You, Shows Study,' published in *NewScientist,* where Vince examines an online study of over 40,000 individuals carried out by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine that concludes disgust is more specific than a 'response to "otherness" .... i.e. to highlight danger from infection'.

even act) of vomiting. What is it about the representation of faeces and bowel movements in *Human Centipede* and *Human Centipede II* that evokes nausea and, potentially, vomiting?[165]

The faecal image in *Human Centipede II* generates intense physical responses because, I argue, it is an example of haptic visuality. After Martin unsuccessfully attempts to manipulate and stimulate the centipede's digestive system by feeding the front segment, he resorts to injecting the entire creature with laxatives. The result is explosive. It begins in a similar fashion to the equivalent scene in the original film: digestive and bowel sounds overlay close-ups of various segments, as their throats and stomachs convulse. When these sounds become more violent, there is a medium close-up of Martin's sheer delighted face, his eyes wide with glee. Close-ups of the various sections continue, along with the screams and sounds of flatulence, until a seam tears and faeces flies towards, and hits, the lens of the camera. The stool is loose, coloured brown (the only colour in this black and white film) and resembles the texture of the food that Martin previously forced upon the front segment. Its glistening texture and depth of colour (relative to the rest of the film) seduces the gaze. The image is haptic because it collapses visuality with the sense of touch; however, whereas Marks describes the way her eyes are used as organs of touch that brush against the surface of Beharry's mother's sari (*Seeing is Believing,* 1991),[166] the connection that has been made between faeces and food – both due to its

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[165] In his article, 'Toward a Poetics of Cinematic Disgust,' Julian Hanich categorises a number of ways film-makers may generate disgust. He argues that to provoke disgust is an art because, even though it is readily generated, it is more complex due to the fact that 'movie theatre disgust comes in an astounding variety of forms, and solicits a range of spectatorial responses' (2011: 12). This thesis agrees with this approach to cinematic disgust and, as such, questions how the *Human Centipede* films elicit the anxiety of nausea or desire to vomit rather than asserting that the faecal image or suggestion of faeces are, simply, universally disgusting.
[166] I refer to Marks's analysis of this film in the introduction to this thesis.

similarity to the food already mentioned and the fact that it *is* food for the majority of

the centipede segments –connects this image to the senses of touch, taste and smell.

In *Human Centipede II*, the faecal image is visually ingested.[167]

Visual detail of faeces is omitted in *Human Centipede*, however. Instead, the film

capitalises on the embodied aurality of human waste – bowel movements are highly

recognisable and identifiable sounds – and the suggestive convulsions of throats. We

identify, I argue, not with the characters' narrative trajectories, but with their bodily

sounds and movements in a form of corporeal mimicry that extends further than the

surface of the skin. As I noted in relation to the scream in Chapter One, Arnie Cox,

in his article 'The Mimetic Hypothesis', argues that 'part of how we understand

human movement and human-made sounds is in terms of our own experience of

making the same or similar movements and sounds' (2001: 196). The visceral

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[167] Another example of this in a mutilation film is in *13: Game Sayawng / 13: Beloved* (Chookiat Sakveerakul, 2006)*,* where the protagonist, Phuchit, has to complete thirteen tasks for a life-changing sum of money, each one increasingly challenging to his physical, moral and ethical sensibilities. There is a particularly disturbing image when he is in a restaurant, and a stainless steel dome is removed to reveal faeces on a plate. Not only is this offensive because of the context, as it brings together two realms that are often rigorously kept apart (eating and defecating), but also for its disgustingly seductive aesthetic. It appears soft, inspiring the imagination of delicate soufflé, at the same time its mucus glistens, both alluring and repulsive. In her book, *The Material Image*, Brigitte Peucker suggests that 'substances that remind us of our own materiality' are 'visually ingested' (2007: 189), thereby collapsing the sense of seeing with the act of eating, making the faecal image particularly repulsive. Further to this, food images also collapse the sense of seeing with the act of eating, although often this is potentially enjoyable. However, if the food image is associated with an object of revulsion, it can become unpleasantly orally haptic, rather than mouth-watering. Examples of this are far more prominent in *Feed,* where food is made disgusting not just through excess but with its connections to representations of obesity. There is also a striking example in *Human Centipede*: Dr Heiter begins to eat a steak while sitting in the same room as the centipede. There is a bird's-eye shot of the steak, which is very large and bloody, spread out on a smooth white plate which serves to intensify the food's colour and consistency. Upset by the centipede's hostility towards him, Dr Heiter loses his appetite. The viewer, I suggest, identifies with his action of refusing the food, not because of the hostility of the centipede, but because of the steak's connection with a creature that has collapsed notions of eating and defecating, nourishment and waste. The texture of the meat recalls its origin as muscle which, in turn, recalls the viewer back to their own corporeality. Thus the steak is associated with both faeces and cannibalism *(see fig 5.13)*.

sounds of digestion and bowel motions have a physical and mimetic potential because they signify the sensation of the viewer's own bodily functions.
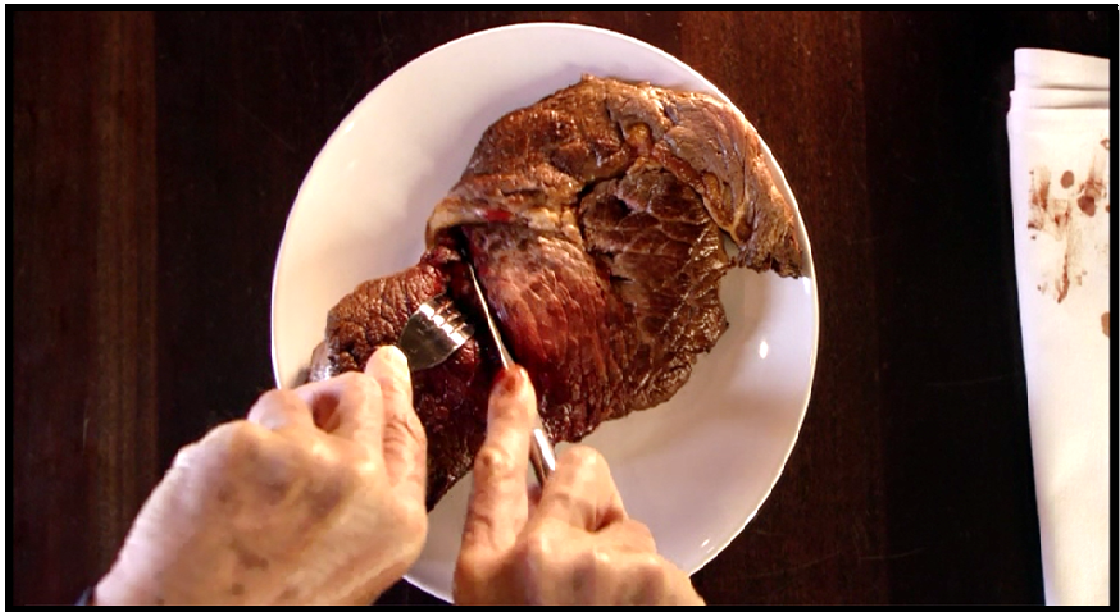
Figure 5.13: *Human Centipede*: **A steak associated with the object of revulsion becomes offensively orally haptic.**

The corporeal mimicry that arises from an identification with the centipede's digestive sounds and convulsions is evident in both films; this representation of faeces, bowel movements and the gut, and not the faecal image, creates an unconscious engagement between the viewer and the film. At this moment, there occurs a 'gap in the viewing experience', which is a moment in spectatorship that, Richard Rushton argues, is defined by complete immersion into the filmic world. In his reworking of Metz's theories of spectatorship, Rushton argues that the process of watching a film takes place;

> along the trajectory of the opposing poles of 'self' and 'other': at one
> pole – the pole of 'otherness' – there is a spectator who is completely
> swept up in and carried away by the film, the spectator who is

completely lost in the film … At the other pole is the spectator who totally rejects what is projected in front of him/her (2002: 115).

There are times in cinema viewing where the viewer can overcome 'self-ness' to be 'engrossed' in the film, where 'cinema gives rise to a loss of self' and the viewer is delivered 'into the arms of the other' (2002: 117). In spite of the ways *Human Centipede* and *Human Centipede II* re-inscribe a distance between viewer and film – through self-reflexivity and editing/visual style – they also stimulate, in these defecation scenes, an intensely visceral engagement that, paradoxically, gives rise to this loss of self that Rushton refers to by returning the viewer to an embodiment that is ordinarily disavowed. I have mentioned that, while watching the centipede under the throes of its bowel movement, I experienced a kind of detachment from the self, where I did not immediately recognise my voice as my own. As my voice is a strong signifier of my subjectivity and individuality, and in this moment it became unrecognisable, the implication is that I was, in that instant, detached from what I consciously understand to be 'me'. As Rushton has argued, the spectatorship delivered me into the arms of the other. Rushton questions what this other is? I suggest that the other is, in fact, the self that has already been othered; this moment where my voice was displaced from my conscious being indicates not only a detachment from the self, but a return to a mode of being that is often placed in the realm of 'otherness': the gut.

This moment in the films' spectatorships is an unconscious identification; the viewer engages with the film as a mode of embodiment that is outside of conscious processes, in this instance, parts of the gastrointestinal tract innervated by the enteric

nervous system. In *Carnal Thoughts,* Sobchack describes her experience of watching *The Piano* where the first shot is of the protagonist's (Ada's) fingers that are, initially, unrecognisable *as* fingers. Instead of being surprised when the film cuts to reveal definitively what the image is (was), Sobchack states that this moment culminated in a confirmation of what her fingers already knew. Sobchack's fingers had 'comprehended that image' and 'felt themselves' before this 'carnal comprehension was refigured into 'conscious thought' (2004: 63). For Sobchack, this move from unconscious, carnal comprehension to conscious thought was constituted by a shot change, a progression she considers pleasurable. For myself, watching the scene described at the beginning of this chapter, this shift was provoked by the emergence of the intense and overwhelming desire (and fear of) to vomit(ing). The grip of nausea, therefore, arises as an *un*pleasurable 'culmination and confirmation of what my [gut] – and I, reflexively if not yet reflectively – already knew' (63). That I reflexively understood this identification is evidenced by my actions: rocking back and forth, scraping my nails across my desk, moaning. These were not reflective acts; only after retching violently was I able to contemplate what had occurred. Before this response, the voice I heard was mere sounds that, on reflection, I was able to recognise as distinct and significant words. In this moment, I suggest, my gut-identification aligned me with Lindsay – not with her character trajectory, but her status as gut. As gut, I identified with Lindsay-as-gut. I was swallowing, against my will, imaginary faeces. The words 'I don't want to' indicate an unwillingness to function the way I must, the way I inevitably will. It signals a strong reluctance to accept myself as gut; as such, I 'other' my voice, and maintain a divide between my subjectivity and my throat, stomach and bowels.

Nausea and vomiting are forms of rejection of the film's spectatorship. These responses parallel Lindsay's stance as Katsuro begins to defecate: her hand pushing against his backside is an attempt to redefine the boundary that faeces threatens to subvert, as it blurs the margins of inside/outside food/waste subject/object. Such reactions serve to reject the film's spectatorship by disrupting the viewing process and overwhelming the film's manipulation of the senses. These responses create a hyper-awareness of the bodily state, and focus turns to *not* vomiting, or reassurances that it is not real in an attempt to soothe an upset stomach. On the (admittedly rare) occasions where vomiting does ensue, it is highly offensive to all the senses – the bitter taste, burning sensation, acrid smell, the sight of part-digested food, the sound of bodily fluids hitting the floor. The organic nature of vomit also redraws the line between viewer as biology/ film as technology, reaffirming the definition of subject and object. These are not, of course, the only ways the spectatorship may be rejected. This is the moment of the film that the viewer is most likely to steel themselves against the inevitable. Like Lindsay's hand pushing against Katsuro, they might tense their bodies and force their thoughts to go elsewhere; they may remind themselves that it is only a film, that it isn't real; they may vocalise their anxiety with moans or shouts, thus disrupting the engagement that the bowel movements on-screen are making offensively visceral; they may turn their heads, close their eyes, place their hands over their ears, or walk away entirely. Those who refuse all these ways of disengaging from the film's spectatorship may find their body revealing its autonomy, as their lungs expel air in a fit of nervous laughter, or their stomach turns and throat convulses, bringing up bile and a consciousness of the inner depths of the gut.

Intense physical responses that define the viewer against the film returns one to an understanding and acceptance of subjectivity that preceded the text. In this way, the *Human Centipede* films resemble the circuitous spectatorship I identified in my analyses of *Hostel* and *Saw II – 3D*, where the proliferation of dismembered body parts reinstate the mastery of the gaze. At certain moments throughout these films, the viewer is 'delivered into the arms of the other' (Rushton, 2002: 117), yet nausea, vomit or the mutilated wound-image returns them to their self. However, Rushton argues that there can ultimately be;

> no return of the self to itself because there is no 'self' up there on the screen to begin with. The experience, rather, has more in common with a divorcing of the self from itself than a fulfilling return of the self to wholeness (2002: 117).

This is true for Lindsay; ultimately, Lindsay has not been returned to wholeness, she has been rendered permeable, vulnerable, a fragment of a whole and divorced from the self, or, rather, the idea of the self as whole and stable. For the viewer also, as identification moves from the unconscious to the conscious of the gut, through nausea, through retching and through bile, the definition of the subject is reaffirmed, yet, the lasting power of the *Human Centipede* films lies in the fact they have underscored the absent and illusory nature of the self that was previously perceived.

By attempting to locate the gut in film analysis, notions of inside and outside are rendered meaningless. Although seemingly internal, the gut can be conceived as

being on the outside of the body. As Wilson observes; 'the gut is a tunnel that permits the exterior to run right through us. Whatever is in the lumen of the gut is thus actually outside of our bodies' (2004: 44). Like the human centipede, the notion of a separateness of mouth and anus of the viewer is an illusion, it is connected via the enteric nervous system and both are part of the digestive tract. The human centipede speaks to our anxieties that we are not closed off from the outside world and from others, nor are we impermeable with a stable exterior closing off and protecting our interiors. Modelled on both an arthropod (the 'real' centipede), and non-arthropod (the worm, as faecal matter works its way through the long body like soil through the worm), the human centipede harks back to the primordial, threatening the fabricated distance between human and animal.[168] Therefore, by signifying and locating the filmic gut in the viewer's body, the human centipede underlines the illusion that subjectivity is constituted as an interiority safely closed off from exteriors, and thus becomes one of the most powerful and notorious figures of horror in recent years.

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[168] The protagonist of both films also call attention to, and blur, the boundary between human and animal as they recall the praying mantis (Dr Heiter) and the slug (Martin) both in appearance and actions. Dr Heiter's tall, lean body, and large scrutinising eyes, imitate the insect that is known for its female decapitating the male during copulation. In her article, 'Surrealism's Praying Mantis and Castrating Woman', Ruth Markus notes that this phenomenon combines death with the creation of life (2000: 33); both Dr Heiter and Martin bring death to their victims literally (most of them do actually die) and figuratively (in their attempts to merge a number of individual subjects into one). Martin's excretions also connect him to creatures that must ooze mucus in order to move across the ground and repel predators. Associations with faeces, insects, and molluscs distance the human subject from illusions of elevation from their animalistic origins.

Conclusion

With close textual analyses throughout this thesis, I have demonstrated clearly that the mutilation film generates concrete physical responses that blur the distinction between notions of the viewer and spectator, as they have been theorised in film studies. My thesis contributes to theories of embodied spectatorship which have become an analytical focus in recent decades, particularly through the works of Vivian Sobchack (1992, 2004), Laura Marks (2000), and Jennifer Barker (2009). These studies draw on phenomenology and Deleuzian frameworks, as well as personal accounts of their own experiences of film-viewing (this last approach is certainly true of Sobchack, and, to a degree, Marks), to bring to the fore corporeality and tactility in notions of film spectatorship. Nevertheless, the terms viewer and spectator continue to be used interchangeably by these scholars; I have argued that the mutilation film constructs a spectatorship that necessitates an interrogation into the relationship and dynamics of these terms.

In the introduction to this thesis, I highlighted the critiques of spectatorship theory that argue it is not sufficiently clear what is meant by the term spectator; at times these are referred to as a textual construction, at others they are given certain attributes such as beliefs and regression (implying, therefore, a viewer that pre-exists the film). Accordingly, I have attempted to keep the characterisation of spectator and viewer at the forefront of my analyses, with a view to demonstrate how the mutilation film refuses any enclosed and clearly demarcated definition of these concepts. I have shown that these terms collapse into each other – meaning, not that

the distinction between them is denied or bridged, rather this distance is not called into question because their positions are paralleled. The use of either term, or the more cumbersome spectator/viewer, is appropriate and, as such, they escape any particular theoretical dilemma. This most often occurs when referring to the 'ocular-specular' spectatorship, a conceptualisation outlined in *Film Theory* (Thomas Elsaesser, Malte Hagener, 2010) that is associated with 'classical cinema' and distinguished for creating an immersive engagement while keeping the spectator at an 'arm's length' (18). The invisibility of the mechanics of film in these instances produces a visual proximity that inhibits the generation of a physical engagement. This is an ideal analogy for the viewer as a split subject, and for the mode of spectatorship dominant during non-torture sequences in *Hostel* (Eli Roth, 2005) and *Saw II – 3D* (Darren Lynn Bousman, 2005, 2006, 2007, David Hackl, 2008, Kevin Greutert, 2009, 2010): at the same time as becoming engrossed in the film as a result of the techniques used to conceal the seams of cinematic construction, they are still sitting in front of the screen and, theoretically, understood as separate from the text. Therefore, the ocular-specular spectator and the viewer are paralleled and, as such, they are often neglected.

As I have demonstrated, during the course of this thesis, this coupling of spectator and viewer is not sustained throughout my analyses of the mutilation film. Indeed, it is the very disruption of these notions that engender such uncomfortable viewing. The torture narrative sequence, that I have called 'the assault' and noted that it is exemplified by *Saw II – 3D* and *Hostel*, produces a rare moment where the viewer loses awareness of sitting in the theatre. Richard Rushton theorises these moments as a spectatorial construction that classical narrative cinema always strives for. The

spectator, in Rushton's words, is 'emptied of all contents' (2002: 113); they give themselves over to the filmic world and believe fully in its construction – its space, time and movement. The term 'spectator' used in this instance, I suggest, refers to the viewer that sits in the theatre rather than a textual construction, because Rushton is discussing a subject that can forget, believe and have a higher or lower degree of awareness in terms of their bodily presence. Yet, in the process of forgetting their position in the theatre, believing wholly in the world of the film and a decreased awareness of bodily presence, the concept of viewer as body in the theatre disappears into the spectator as textual construction. The notion of an 'arm's length', the distancing that defined the position of the spectator/viewer in relation to the text, is now called into question, and the gap between the viewer as body in front of the screen, and spectator as construction of the text, is denied.

The moments in film spectatorship, where the viewer seems to be completely defined by the textual spectator, would perhaps not be so notable in *Hostel* and *Saw II – 3D* (it is a moment that is certainly not isolated to the mutilation film) were it not for what occurs immediately after. During the climax of the assault – the mutilation – graphic representations of the process of fleshy disfigurement resonate in the corporeality of the viewer as the sense of particular body parts that correspond with mutilation on the screen become heightened. The viewer is, therefore, forcefully and painfully returned to their position as a body in the theatre, yet this position is constituted by the film's spectatorship, and thus remains a construction of the text. Neither the term viewer nor spectator sufficiently captures who, or what, is the viewing subject in this instance, because both reinstate notions of interiority (textual positions and roles contained within and made by the film) and exteriority (the

viewer as separate from the film and perceiving it from an external position).
Thinking about these moments in terms of physical spectatorship traverses this
dichotomy, by recognising and accounting for the heightened sense of the body
while remaining fluid as a concept to allow for, and acknowledge, the constitution of
this corporeality as a textual construction.

The discomfort engendered by the process of mutilation is not simply a result of
viewing bodily disfigurement; rather it is the unnerving denial of distance and
distinction between the viewing subject and the film as viewed object. However, just
as it is the norm for films such as *Hostel* and *Saw II – 3D* to always move towards a
sense of conclusion (whether this is achieved dominantly through narrative, or aided
through the score), they also repeatedly return the viewing position to the more
comfortable and less problematic (both experientially and theoretically) 'ocular-
specular'. This is achieved, I have argued, by the mutilated wound-image. The
spectacle of this image centres on expulsion of bodily wastes. The position of the
victim that constituted both an immersive spectatorship and corporeality of the
viewer is now in the process of objectification. The viewer, who was previously
positioned at the collapse of a sadistic and masochistic gaze, now moves to a
position of the voyeur as the body on the screen is objectified as a result of
mutilation. The victim's wounds, severed limbs and expelled waste now lie under
the scrutiny of the gaze that inhibits affective responses.

As this thesis has shown, the spectacle of mutilation is the key aspect of certain
mutilation films that are popularly known as torture porn. The return to the

dominance of the gaze in the final stage of assault also distinguishes *Hostel* and *Saw II – 3D* from the films considered in Chapters Three and Four – films that have previously been discussed in relation to what has been termed the New Extremism. In the introduction to their edited collection on recent films to come out of Europe that are concerned with explicit representations of sex and violence, Tanya Horeck and Tina Kendall suggest that films popularly known as torture porn do not situate violence as means of interrogation into the film-viewer relationship. I would suggest that the dominance of visual detail of mutilation in *Hostel* and *Saw II – 3D* has engendered an assumption that these films uphold cinematic structures that privilege the male sadistic gaze. In contrast, the analyses presented in Chapters One and Two show that these films create identifications with the victim rather than the torturer;[169] furthermore, certain images that suggest the construction of a sadistic gaze (the mutilating wound-image) direct this look towards the self; in other words, the bleeding wound returns the destructive gaze.

As I have argued throughout, physical spectatorship that constitutes the corporeality of the viewer through the representation of mutilation is formed, not only in visual terms, but also through sound. As this thesis has demonstrated, sound is, arguably, far more fitting for blurring the distinction between spectator and viewer, and for constructing a physical spectatorship, because it potentially undermines the dominance of the gaze and situates itself in the body of the viewer. Sounds can be haptic, meaning that they connect the senses by not being perceived only through hearing but also by feeling. The most prominent example of this in the films looked

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[169] As I referenced in Chapter One, Dean Lockwood also makes this argument in his article 'All Stripped Down,' (2009: 40-48).

at in this thesis is Esther's breathing (*Dans Ma Peau,* Marina de Van, 2002) which not only creates an intensely textured soundscape that I have described as aggravating the skin of the viewer, but also recalls to the viewer their own status as a breathing subject. The film's sound, therefore, evokes a sense memory that grounds the viewer firmly in their own corporeality that extends outside and beyond the text; again, the physical spectatorship constitutes the body of the viewer but, with the use of sound, it penetrates deeper than the surface wounds imagined by the mutilating wound-image. Instead, physical responses become detached from the object of anxiety (mutilation) and appear to originate from within the viewer. In this way, sound is central to the generation of affect in the mutilation film.

Affect is defined in two distinct ways in this thesis – first through the relationship between sound and image and, second, through the physiological dimensions of sound alone. Sound that is clearly perceptible but separated from its image generates anxiety that cannot be placed onto an object, because the process of mutilation is not visually represented. Therefore, affect is separated from its original source (mutilation) and both arises in, and constitutes, the body of the viewer. Sound that, first, is not a signifier of any tangible, diegetic object, and, second, is barely perceptible, both situates the viewer as the object of anxiety and bypasses the cerebral cortex by directly affecting the viewer's nervous system. The limited levels of perception that sub-bass frequencies allow serve to disrupt structures of identification that would normally situate the viewer as separate from the film. Finally, with the use of high frequencies that result in otoacoustic emissions – a phenomenon where sound travels outwards from the inner ear to the middle ear – position the viewer as instrument, both perceiver and creator of the soundscape. In

Dans Ma Peau, Irréversible (Gaspar Noé, 2002) and *À l'intérieur* (Alexandre Bustillo and Julien Maury, 2007), the viewer identifies with the fate of each victim – the self-harmer, the raped and the persecuted – each with a different use of sound. Rather than create a circuitous sequence of narrative that continuously bears the threat of objectification, before returning the viewer/spectator to an ocular-specular position, the aural representation of mutilation creates and maintains a viewing position that painfully draws attention to its status as split between subject and object.

Whereas the majority of mutilation films generate forms of anxiety as described above, whether generalised or focused towards a particular body-part, a much smaller number have been released in the past few years that evoke another significant response: nausea and, along with it, the fear of vomiting and/or the desire to vomit. Nausea cannot be entirely separated from the forms of anxiety theorised through close analyses of mutilation films in Chapters One to Four; however, certain films evoke this response dominantly through representations of the gut. In relation to these films, (for example, *The Human Centipede: First Sequence* (Tom Six, 2009)*, The Human Centipede: Full Sequence* (Tom Six, 2011)) mutilation occurs as the human body is located at the point where concepts of eating and excreting, nourishment and waste, collapse. The subject that is defined by notions of interiority/exteriority disintegrates both on and off the screen as the viewer identifies with the gut on the screen as an unconscious other, before these identifications are forced into consciousness through nausea and the fear of/desire to vomit(ing). By generating these responses, *Human Centipede* and *Human Centipede II,* push us to consider the question Rushton poses in his return to Christian Metz' theories of

spectatorship: if film delivers us into the arms of the other, what is the nature of this other? Like the torture narrative sequence, there are moments in the *Human Centipede* films that can be defined as 'gaps in the viewing experience', where the viewer wholly and fully believes in the world of the film. These moments deliver us into the arms of the other and, as such, generate a nausea-response that reinstates the boundary between viewer and film. Close-ups of convulsing throats and a soundtrack of bowel movements construct a mode of spectatorship where the viewer identifies with the centipede, not with their gut but *as* their gut. The other that they have been delivered to is themselves – with a preoccupation on faecal waste and the manipulation of existing orifices (rather than the creation of new ones with penetrating weapons) the *Centipede* films momentarily destabilise the conception of the subject.

I would like to return to Dean Lockwood's theory I referenced in the introduction to this thesis, that films which engage the viewer strongly and viscerally in the position of the victim of mutilation (Lockwood refers to mainstream torture porn; for my purposes I am extending this to the mutilation film as, I have argued, these particular preoccupations extend across genres) can be read as allegories of becoming. In other words, the physical responses these films generate potentially have a transformative potential, as the structures of the subject are dismantled. Lockwood draws on the narrative of the *Saw* franchise, which lends itself so well to this theory, because the entire premise is based on people who are not living their lives to the full[170] (we could also, in this respect, think of Sarah in *À l'intérieur,* Esther in *Dans Ma Peau,*

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[170] The definition of this is incredibly loose in these films, from immoral insurance brokers to women stuck in abusive relationships.

and the woman in *Antichrist* (Lars von Trier, 2009)). The films themselves seem to connect, in some way, mutilation and bodily sensations, with dilemmas of day to day life, whether these can be argued to be contemporary or otherwise (for example, the *Saw* films present troubled characters who turn to drug use and prostitution in a modern, urban environment; however, these are, of course, not problems restricted to recent years, cities, or the proliferation of the mutilation film). Is it possible, then, to conclude from this, that the engagement between the viewer and the mutilation film necessarily culminates in a transformative experience?

Both Lockwood's and Gabrielle Murray's (2008) articles seem to suggest that there is a certain level of disengagement, of disaffectation, on the part of the audiences, that the mutilation film is in some way addressing. Lockwood references Patricia MacCormack, who suggests we 'gift' ourselves to affect (2005: 352). Affect, then, is something with which we may award ourselves by engaging with the mutilation film. The idea of being closed off from affect has also been posited by the French philosopher Bernard Steigler who, in his article 'The Disaffected Individual,' suggests that 'affective saturation … disaffects us, slowly but ineluctably, from ourselves and our others, disindividuating us psychically as much as collectively' (2006). However, the proliferation of the mutilation film, it could be argued, is in itself an example of such a saturation of affect; indeed, it does seem to be a short-lived contemporary phenomenon (although the visceral aesthetic it is notable for extends beyond the mutilation film). Has the mutilation film, initially some form of response to a saturation of affect that has led to disaffectation, now become a cause of the very state it strained against? This raises a number of questions: why torture, self-harm and rape? Why not other modes of physical spectatorship (as, I argue, it is

a spectatorship that can be thought about in relation to physicalities other than nausea and anxiety)? If, as Steigler suggests, we are *all* disaffected,[171] why do we all not seek out the mutilation film? Why is it so interesting, fascinating, exhilarating, amusing, boring and unbearable depending on the viewer? [172]

The answer to these questions could be that there are other ways of returning to affect, and also locating physicality at the intersection of entertainment media and bodies, that are not, perhaps, so anxiety-focused. One way of thinking about the mutilation film is as a participatory form of entertainment (particularly in the case of such films as *À l'intérieur*, where the viewer's ears contribute toward the soundtrack). This aspect of the mutilation film is prevalent in a wide range of media

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[171] He states that city-dwellers are saturated with affect, but we are most, if not all, city-dwellers now.

[172] Further research may also be done on the mutilation film and physical spectatorship in relation to ideas surrounding anxieties of the flesh; in particular, the vulnerability and mortality of the human body. This is often thought about in relation to science fiction, in particular, the cyborg. In her book, *Electronic Eros,* Claudia Springer discusses media representations of the cyborg, which she defines as the obvious fusion of flesh and machine, where mechanics are crudely connected to skin and muscle tissue. These figures are, she argues, a result of increased anxieties towards physical existence and the mortality that such an existence implies. Springer argues that increased dangers of nuclear warfare, environmental disasters and diseases such as the AIDS virus, have led us to a heightened awareness of our own physical vulnerability. By replacing soft, penetrable flesh with solid, impervious metal in the form of cyborgs, science fiction cinema is providing a way of distancing human life from the fact of mortality (1996: 1-49). Springer is not alone in reading the cyborg as an attack on, and solution to, the human body. Mark Dery considers the merging of man and machine to be a 'seductive alternative to the vile body' (2000: 43). This argument, however, does not explain the continued development of cyborgs and androids to imitate humanity almost perfectly in all its vulnerability, such as the replicants and cylons of *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982) and the remake of the television series *Battlestar Galactica* (various directors, 2004-2009)*.* Similarly, intense physical responses of anxiety might seem to revel, rather than despair, in the idea of mortality; however, it could also be argued that by repeating the assault narrative sequence reaffirms *im*mortality thus relieving such anxieties of the flesh. We could suggest that physical spectatorship offers an escape from such anxieties, as Gabrielle Murray describes in her article on *Hostel II*; '[w]e forget ourselves — our cognitive subjectivity — in the immensity of physical feeling. Apprehension, anticipation and fear bring us back to the moment, to the body, to the immediacy of the "perception of feeling"' (2008). Physical spectatorship may, therefore, be understood in relation to notions of temporality, extricating fears for the future with anxieties towards present corporeality. It is clear that all of these ideas and hypotheses would benefit greatly from future research.

and, as Mark Wolf states in his book *Building Imaginary Worlds,* this harks back to childhood games of pretend, where toys allow the child to invent their own fantasy world (2012: 138). In recent years, a significant number of MMORPGs (massively multi-player on-line role-playing game) have emerged, including *World of Warcraft* (2010), *Star Trek Online* (2010), and *LEGO Universe* (2010), as well as non-game virtual worlds such as *Second Life* (2003) (Wolf, 2012: 143).[173] Engagement between people is continually evolving – the mutilation film may be considered as part of this process.

In his book *As If,* Michael Saler notes that the 'modern West has been called "disenchanted,"' before suggesting that this is 'a half-truth', and referencing escapist behaviours that extend beyond perceptions of fantasy fans (or 'geeks') and includes in-depth discussions of television shows and films that betray an immersive involvement (2012: 3-4). This raises yet another question: do these forms of entertainment, including the mutilation film, show that the 'modern West' is, in fact, *not* disenchanted? Or, does it evidence the fact that, starved of affect, role-playing games, fantasy worlds and torture narratives are a last, and extreme, resort? As stated above, these questions that often lead to unified theories of both media and the societies from which they originate, cannot be broached from within one theory or framework alone. A comprehensive exploration into the motivation behind viewing the mutilation film, and other media that reconfigure notions of

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[173] We could add to this list of media that reformulates the viewer/spectator/player/listener/participant's body in relation to the text: technological advances and experimentation in film, such as 3D, and increasing the amount of frames projected on the screen per second; theatre companies that foreground the participation of audiences (such as Punch-Drunk Theatre Company); and orchestras that highlight and capitalise on the multi-sensual dimensions of music, by inviting deaf children to sit on speakers and touch the instruments while they're being played.

viewer/spectator/player/listener/participant, must take a multi-faceted approach, to embrace cultural theory, gender theory, feminist theory, psychoanalytic theory, cognitive theory, audience reception studies, and to continually interrogate not only the media and its viewers, but the concept of pleasure.

Since I began researching this thesis, the *Saw* franchise has ended, the third instalment of *Hostel* was released straight to DVD, and James Quandt, one of the first scholars to write about the proliferation of 'extreme' cinema to emerge from Europe, has suggested many of these films now 'look like desperate artefacts' (2012: 213). What does this mean for the future of the mutilation film and physical spectatorship? The latter, of course, is not tied to the former; physical spectatorship can be considered in relation to any number of films – from romantic comedies, to crime thrillers, to epic fantasy films. But what about the human body that is visually and aurally disintegrating? In recent years, horror films have turned slightly more towards the supernatural (including *Insidious* (James Wan, 2010)*, The Last Exorcism* (Daniel Stamm, 2010)*, Paranormal Activity* (Oren Peli, 2007)*, Paranormal Activity 2* (Tod Williams, 2010), *Paranormal Activity 3* (Henry Joost and Ariel Schulman, 2011)*, Paranormal Activity 4* (Henry Joost and Ariel Schulman, 2012), *The Possession* (Ole Bornedal, 2012)*, and remakes, including *Friday the 13*th (Marcus Nispel, 2009)*, A Nightmare on Elm Street* (Samuel Bayer, 2010)*, Sorority Row* (Stewart Hendler, 2009) and *The Last House on the Left* (Dennis Iliadis, 2009). Visual detail of the mutilated body is clearly evident in two of these films (in *The Last Exorcism*, the young female protagonist, Nell breaks her own fingers, generating intensely uncomfortable corporeal mimicry, and in *The Last House on the Left*, the father of one of the raped girls explodes the attacker's head in a microwave

– this appears overly excessive and jarring with the tone of the rest of the film, which is slightly more akin to the gritty 'realism' of the original). Rather than evidencing the continuing prominence of the mutilation film, these moments are lasting traces.[174] The time of the mutilation film as we know it is, I would suggest, coming to an end;[175] but judging by the lasting strength of its predecessors – the video nasties, Italian cannibal and zombie films, the slasher film – it is only a matter of time before we are presented with fresh and innovative (and, hopefully, even more disturbing) filmic attacks on the human body.

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[174] I would suggest that, in the case of *The Last House on the Left,* it was an attempt to make a classic film more appealing to contemporary audiences; and, in the case of *The Last Exorcism,* Eli Roth (director of *Hostel* and *Hostel II*) was the producer. The technique of generating corporeal mimicry was very possibly an input from Roth, showing that, even though he has moved from non-supernatural 'gore' to capitalising on the power of suggestion, certain film-making tendencies die hard.

[175] However, I eagerly await the third instalment of the *Human Centipede* films, scheduled for release in 2013.

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